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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

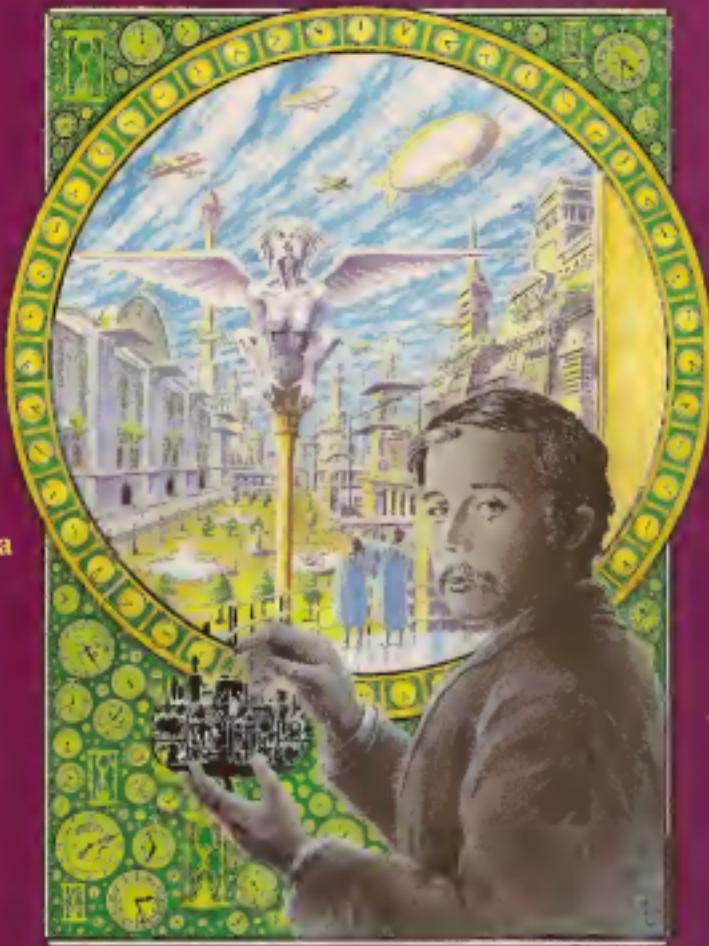
January  
1995

'The Hunger  
and Ecstasy of  
Vampires' by  
Brian Stableford

plus stories by  
Stephen Baxter  
Peter Garratt  
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# interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 91

January 1995

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Cover by SMS celebrating the centenary of *The Time Machine*

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# Interface



Eighteen Ninety-Five was quite a year. It saw publication of H. G. Wells's first important work of fiction, *The Time Machine*, which inaugurated the tradition of the British scientific romance (yes, there were plenty of precursors, from Mary Shelley to George Griffith, but it was only with Wells – and in particular with *The Time Machine* – that British SF really arrived). In 1895 the fecund Wells also published a fantasy, *The Wonderful Visit*, and such short stories as 'The Argonauts of the Air'. This was the year Wilhelm Roentgen discovered X-Rays, and Guglielmo Marconi

made the first radio antenna. It was also the year in which the Yellow Nineties reached their apogee with the trial and martyrdom of Oscar Wilde (a great fantasy and horror writer, among other things). Wilde's fellow Dubliner Bram Stoker, was already engaged in writing *Dracula* (1897), the cornerstone of the modern horror genre. And towards the end of 1895 there arrived a whole new technological means of storytelling, the cinema, heralded by the first projected film-shows of the Lumière brothers in Paris.

Beginning immediately in 1895, there appeared a succession of one-minute trick films, many of them with "science-fictional"

subject matter (sausage-making machines, limb transplants, automata, X-ray machines, giant insects, aircraft). Of course, the first proper science-fiction film was still several years away (Georges Méliès's 21-minute epic *Voyage dans la lune*, 1902, vaguely based on Jules Verne), as was the first successful heavier-than-air flight (the Wright brothers, Kitty Hawk 1903), but 1895, despite its *fin de siècle* associations, represents a beginning – for science fiction, for the cinema, and for the 20th Century. We celebrate that remarkable year in this issue's two principal stories, by those present-day Wellsians Brian Stableford and Stephen Baxter.

## Books of SF, Fantasy & Horror Interest First Published in 1895

*The Little Green Man* by F. M. Allen  
*The British Barbarians* by Grant Allen  
*The Desire of the Eyes and Other Stories*  
by Grant Allen  
*The Story of Ulva and Other Tales*  
by Edwin Lester Arnold  
*A House-Boat on the Styx*  
by John Kendrick Bangs  
*The Face and the Mask* by Robert Barr  
*The Green Mouse* by Robert W. Chambers  
*The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers  
*The Sorrows of Satan* by Marie Corelli  
*Black Spirits and White*  
by Ralph Adams Cram  
*The Crack of Doom* by Robert Cromie  
*The Lost Stradivarius* by J. Meade Falkner  
*The Wallpug of Why* by G. E. Farrow  
*The Ghost of Guy Thistle* by Edgar Fawcett  
*The Outlaws of the Air* by George Griffith  
*Valdy the Off-Born* by George Griffith  
*Heart of the World* by H. Rider Haggard  
*Stella & An Unfinished Communication*  
by S. E. Hinton  
*The House of Joy* by Laurence Housman  
*The Second Jungle Book*  
by Rudyard Kipling

*Zoranda* by William Le Queux  
*Edosphera, or The End of the Earth*  
by John Um Lloyd  
*Lilith* by George MacDonald  
*The Sin-Eater and Other Tales*  
by Fiona Macleod  
*The Three Impostors* by Arthur Machen  
*Child Christopher and Goldilock the Fair*  
by William Morris  
*The Great Secret* by Hume Nisbet  
*Dies Irae: The Story of a Spirit in Prison*  
by Margaret Oliphant  
*The Impregnable City* by Mat Pemberton  
*A Deal with the Devil* by Eden Philpott  
*The Garden Behind the Moon*  
by Howard Pyke  
*Lost in a Comet's Tail* (and many other  
Frank Reade, Jr. novellas)  
by Luis P. Senarens  
*Prince Zaleski* by M. P. Shiel  
*Propeller Island* by Jules Verne  
*The Stolen Bacillus and Other Incidents*  
by H. G. Wells  
*The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells  
*The Wonderful Visit* by H. G. Wells

If retrospective Hugo, World Fantasy and Bram Stoker awards could be given to the books of 1895, which titles would be the winners? The Hugo Award, undoubtedly, ten times over, to *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells, the World Fantasy Award, equally undoubtedly, to *Lilith* by George MacDonald, and the Bram Stoker Award, perhaps, to *The Three Impostors* by Arthur Machen (although Chambers's *The King in Yellow* and Falkner's *The Lost Stradivarius* would both be strong contenders for this last). Anyone disagree? To put things in perspective, let us not forget that the runaway bestseller of 1895 was that forgotten masterpiece of kitsch, Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan*. If awards had been voted on by "fans" of the day, perhaps Corelli would have swept the board. A sobering thought.

David Pringle

# Interaction

## Dear Editors

The account of my confrontation with Bob Heinlein in Tom Shippey's Mexican lecture (*Interzone* 88, October) is largely correct, and in fact it has been fairly widely reported. There's a brief version in Larry Niven's *N-Space*, and a very full account in Chapter 28 of Neil McAleer's *Odyssey: The Authorized Biography of Arthur C. Clarke*.

The confrontation took place in Larry's house, and those present included Teller's deputy Lowell Wood, and General Dan Graham, the High Frontier chairman. Recently I was approached by someone who wanted to do a write-up of the whole affair, and I suggested they contact the principals and then send it to me for my comments.

The whole incident was so unpleasant that I tend to suppress any memories, but as it was of some importance I think we should put the record straight. All good wishes.

**Arthur C. Clarke**

Colombo, Sri Lanka

**Editor:** With reference to Tom Shippey's article in issue 88, we'd like to point out that his piece also appears in *Foundation* no. 61, September 1994, in a rather fuller revised version with footnotes. It was not intended that the speech appear in both magazines, but there was a mix-up (caused by the very long delay in publication of *Nexus* 4, which eventually became *Interzone* 88) and for that reason, by the delay in publication of *Foundation* 61 which did not come out in the summer but later) We apologize for our part in the confusion.

## Dear Editors

I would like to correct the information given at the end of the Alan Moore interview (*Interzone* 89). He is currently writing a novel for Gollancz, entitled *Voice of the Fire*. This will be Alan's first foray into full-length prose and I'm very excited about it. He is about half-way through and we expect to publish in 1996. Thanks for your attention.

**Faith Brook**

Senior Editor, Victor Gollancz Ltd

## Dear Editors

Thanks for getting an e-mail address. I kept meaning to write to you, but somehow never got around to it. So, when I saw the e-mail address, I finally sat down at my computer.

I've been reading *Interzone* since issue one – always getting it here in the USA. I've enjoyed watching the magazine develop and improve. It provides an introduction to many good authors and stories that I just would not get here in the US. I used to also read Asimov's SF Magazine, but finally got a bit bored with it.

First, the Good –

Lots of great stories, introducing me to

lots of new authors – Greg Egan, Geoff Ryman etc – as well as providing authors I already knew like Ian McDonald, Adlise Ballard, Holdstock etc. Good Book Reviews – even though I can't get some of the books in the US at all (I sometimes get British editions at Dark Carnival bookstore in Berkeley). Interesting interviews – sometimes introducing me to a new author that I had not heard of.

### The Bad –

I don't care much at all for the new graphics look which started in IZ 88. I am not particularly stuck in the mud about liking the old style. I just find the new style to be harder to read and distracting from the stories. Keep searching and trying – there is nothing sacred about the old way. I'm just not very pleased with this particular new one. No comments about the new editorial approach (haven't read #88 fully yet – partly put off by the graphics).

Overall – KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK. I'll keep my subscription going as long as you continue to explore new writers, new edges of sf etc. Someone has to keep this field moving forward.

**Gary Frankel**  
Nevada City, CA

**Editor:** The above letter, and the following one, both came by electronic mail, which is a handy way to receive readers' comments (our e-mail address is [interzone@csx.complain.co.uk](mailto:interzone@csx.complain.co.uk)). As I send in issue 89, we're still in the early stages of learning how to use the facility and as yet we don't want to receive subscription queries or story-submission enquiries by e-mail (we would not be able to cope with these) – but those readers who wish to send comments for the letter column, and who have access to the means, are welcome to send us their remarks electronically.

## Dear Editors

You asked for comments on your redesign, so I'll let you have mine. I have no objections to this in principle, but some of the details of the changes don't seem to me to be for the better. Your new font looks rather thin and grey, making the magazine harder to read – while some of the titles and headings are all too heavy by comparison. I think that some more consideration may be in order.

As to the actual content – I think that I want you to stick with the established IZ style. Comparing issues 88 and 89, I much preferred the latter, despite the fact that only one of the stories in it really worked for me, and that not much

At least these tales were trying, successfully or otherwise, to go out into the world as stories – to be the sort of thing that a broad-minded 'non-sf reader' might read and grasp and perhaps enjoy. By contrast, everything in 88 – even the fiction – seemed introverted and rather jarrish – although the fandom involved might range from traditional skiffy drinker-thinkers to black-clad pretentious pseudo-existentialists.

Sorry to seem so conservative, but you asked for opinions.

## Phil Masters

**Editor:** The apparently 'thin and grey' type has been causing us some concern too. Paul Brazier is working on thickening it up – perhaps you'll see an improvement this issue – and we certainly intend to get it right in the end.

## Dear Editors

A quick note with a thought for a new *Interaction* feature which occurred to me while reading John Clute's review column. He and other reviewers often quote leading and well-recognized examples of particular plot scenarios or sf ideas. However, your younger readership (myself included, of course!) may be unfamiliar with some of these 1950s, 60s and 70s classics.

So it may be worthwhile considering a new one-two page feature where readers, contributors, authors etc. list their top ten 'sf' titles together with a brief plot summary and details of why they rate each title so highly. Apologies if this has been



done prior to issue 60 when my subscription started. Regards and congratulations on maintaining a highly enjoyable and excellent-value publication.

Julian Remnant  
London

**Editor:** A long time ago we did attempt something of the sort you suggest, asking readers to list their Top Ten, but the response was patchy. Would anyone like to have a go again? Meanwhile speaking personally, my book *The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction* (Grafton 1990) was intended to fill the gap you point out with its thousand "reviews" and star-ratings of several thousand of titles past and present. You may be interested to know that I've recently completed a second edition of this book, adding about 40,000 words and revising much of the old material. It will appear as a fat hardcover from *Solar Press*, a division of *Asmodee Publishing*, Aldershot, Hampshire, early in 1995. You might like to try ordering it from your library — David Pringle

Dear Editors

It looks as though *Interzone* is following the Rupert Murdoch guide to media domination — swallowing the competition up like gumdrops. First *Milwue*, now *News*? What next? *New Worlds*? *The Christian Science Monitor*? Hello?

Issue 88 was puzzling at the start. There seemed to be a mild degree of clutter and an air of — dare I say it? — insobriety about the whole thing. Where, for instance, was the normal David Langford mug-shot, with his candid, professorial grimace? Instead he's got some jaunty little cartoon chap to stand in for him, as if we read him for his jokes, for goodness sake! Still, using "Ansible Link" as a kind of home base, I gradually managed to negotiate my way around the unfamiliar territory and, once I'd recovered from the culture shock, I must say much of it was very pleasing, and alleviated one or two things that have bugged me about *I2* for a while now.

I'll admit, straight off, I've never been a fan of *I2*'s artwork. Usually, the pictures look like excerpts from a book called *Interzone: The Graphic Novel*, which might well be worth investigating, except this isn't a graphic novel, and if the writers go to all the trouble to describe their characters, locations and so forth, I don't particularly want to see an artist duplicate the effort. Especially when they always seem to get it wrong — well, I don't think those people and those places look like that at all, thank you. This kind of realistic, down-home artwork just short-circuits the imagination, and only rarely gives us something worth enjoying for its own sake.

*I2* seems to have solved all this. The artwork was more abstract, decorative, intent on ornamenting rather than depicting, yet it actually added to the stories — especially the first two. I, for one, look forward to an *Interzone* packed full with line drawings of mushrooms, rhubarb, chocolate fudge cake and the like. The red wine looked quite appetizing too.

The non-fiction was welcome. I don't buy

many of books these days, and wouldn't be so bothered if your book reviews were partly sacrificed for more in-depth work of the type you carry here. I realize *Interzone's* reviews may constitute a kind of public service giving notices to books the literary press would probably ignore, but do they sell the books? Perhaps they do. Just not to me, that's all.

If I buy a new book, it's usually because I know the author's work from elsewhere (like *I2*), or I've read some long critique or interview that gives me more than just an outline of the plot, and points on someone's personal Richter Scale of taste. Much sf, in any case, merely recycles old material. A brief review synopsis of, say, Womack's *Elvissey* might well look like the usual amalgam of old clichés — alternate worlds, urban decay and famous people doing not-so-famous things. It was the interview you ran that made me want to read the thing. And I wasn't disappointed either. Reviews in general don't have the space to give the flavour of a book, and, though the standard of *I2*'s reviews is high, I really don't believe I'd miss them (too) much.

In this issue, the Shuppy piece was good, the Priest and Tuttle interesting, and the Greenland packed the full emotive charge of good short story writing — factual or not. The Connor piece — was this sf? Does anybody care? — dealt amusingly with one of the big topics of life literature, and much else besides (well, death is usually considered quite significant, at any rate). More, please.

And from death, by an unfortunate and unintentional segue, to Paul Brazier's editorial. Interesting, provocative and with a lot I could agree with. But what's this? Engineering fiction? At last I cried a market for my great unpublished epic, *How I Changed a Fuse and Fixed the Food Blender in Only Three Days, Fourteen Hours and Twenty-Seven Minutes Flat*. Let's get things have moved on since then. Let's use science fiction to digest the information revolution. "This sounds alarmingly like all those claims that science fiction must be good for us since it encourages young kids to study science does it? There's a big big difference between sf science and your Physics homework, I'm quite sure."

Certainly, sf can help us get to grips with things. It can deal with the relationship between ourselves and the technology we use, which nowadays so few of us can understand (I'm typing this on a borrowed PC. How does it work? I've no idea. The typewriter I just about managed to grasp) — mean, it had these moving parts. The widespread nature of that technology, though, means that its province is no longer just sf's. Mainstream literature can take technology head-on, as well — and not just in the techno-thrillers that so obviously abut on sf territory. Look at Baker's *Van*, a novel about people talking sex over the telephone. Regardless of its merits, that surely says as much about relations between people and technology as anything that William Gibson's ever done.

As for extrapolation and "if this goes on... Well, maybe the piece in *I2* #88 that

...is the editor's idea (and, to continue the logic from this issue) as the *Romeo and Juliet Space for the Unfortunate* — I'm not sure, showing a potential upside of the information revolution — the author's performance — right down to odd — functions — can be monitored and summed so accurately that his whole career can stand or fall by how much sweat he gives off in a single, vital meeting (OK, so I'm paraphrasing — apologies to the author). Do we believe that this will happen? Probably not. Are we intended to believe it? I don't think so. Rather I think Ryman's story is attempting to point up the pressure many people — even in comparatively lowly jobs — are under these days to achieve. This is not extrapolation. This is *NOW*. Ryman is using the convenient device of new info technology in a *reductio ad absurdum* of the kind beloved by satirists since Aristophanes — and probably before as well. (Interestingly, an entirely opposite scenario could have been postulated from current events: the way that, despite the new information technology, so many people still manage to further their careers on a rich, calculating mix of bullshit, huckaking and bluff — some things never change.)

In short, sf may well help us explore the possibilities inherent in the new technology. But at its best, its aims are far more general: investigating what it feels like to be human living in a universe we scarcely understand, and trying to make some sense out of our lives. In short, the stuff of any fiction, science- or otherwise.

Plus, of course, a hefty chunk of entertainment.

General comments on #88's fiction? Well, it seemed like fairly standard *I2* stuff to me. Better than some, not as good as others. Maybe a little bit more quirky, which was nice. A magazine should take a few risks, after all. It's got a certain built-in obsolescence (there's another one along next month). I and, commercial matters to one side, if a story turns out not to be a deathless masterpiece, or not to find immediate favour with the readership, there's surely little harm done. Is there?

Readers, anyway, are funny beasts. Listen — if anybody wants to win the *I2* poll, Klaarh and Holdstock have the formula: *...will take an old, familiar theme, one everybody recognizes and feels good about, and then you do it much, much better than it's ever been done previously. Simple, eh?*

I'm not quibbling with *The Ragthorn*'s merits, which were considerable, or saying that it should have come first. Just that the d\*ck were oaded people like the stuff may recognize. Meanwhile, a piece like *"My Informant" Zandor* — genuinely radical and innovative, very much the kind of thing sf needs to push it forward — failed to chart.

But then that's life. Or data flow. Or something. Best wishes and thanks to all concerned with *I2* for continuing to turn out an intriguing, provocative and entertaining magazine.

Tim Lees

Oswald, Cheshire

# CLEARANCE SALE!

In order to clear storage space, we have drastically reduced the price on our early back-issue stocks. Until further notice, any of *Interzone*'s **first 50 issues** which remain in print are available to inland readers at just

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#3, Autumn 1982: Carter, Garnett, Kilworth, Saxton, etc.

#8, Summer 1984: Ballard, Bradfield, Dick, Newman, etc.

#9, Autumn 1984: Aldiss, Ballard, Disch, Gibson, Harrison

#10, Winter 1984/85: Bradfield, Burns, Pollack, Wolfe, etc

#11, Spring 1985: Langford, Shirley/Sterling, Roberts, etc

#12, Summer 1985: Bishop, Harrison, McAuley, Zolline, etc

#13, Autumn 1985: Ballard, Bayley, Ferguson, Watson, etc.

#14, Winter 1985/86: McAuley, Newman, Sterling, Watson, etc

#15, Spring 1986: Brosnan, Gibson, Kilworth, Reed, etc

#18, Winter 1986/87: Benford, Campbell, Egan, Watson, etc

#19, Spring 1987: Ferguson, McAuley, Newman, Baxter, etc

#24, Summer 1988: Brown, Fowler, Mann, Stableford, etc

#25, Sep/Oct 1988: Griffith, Langford, Preuss, Watson, etc

#26, Nov/Dec 1988: Brown, Pratchett, Shaw, Sladek, etc.

#27, Jan/Feb 1989: Bayley, Brosnan, Robinson, Shaw, etc

#28, Mar/Apr 1989: Baxter, Campbell, Newman, Rucker/Landlaw

#29, May/Jun 1989: Egan, Fowler, Kilworth, Mann, etc

#30, Jul/Aug 1989: Ballard, Brooke, Goldstein, MacLeod, etc

#31, Sep/Oct 1989: Brown, Gribbin, Jones, Stross, etc

#32, Nov/Dec 1989: Bayley, Calder, McDonald, Royle, etc

#33, Jan/Feb 1990: Binn, Carroll, Newman, Watson, etc.

#34, Mar/Apr 1990: Calder, Brooke, Griffith, MacLeod, etc

#35, May 1990: Baxter, Bayley, Disch, Stableford, etc.

#36, Jun 1990: Egan, Ings, Newman, Reynolds, etc

#37, Jul 1990: Bear, Brooke, Egan, Lee, Stross, etc

#38, Aug 1990: special Aldiss issue, Bear, Stableford, etc

#39, Sep 1990: Brooke, Garnett, MacLeod, Tuttle, etc

#40, Oct 1990: Calder, Gibson/Sterling, Gribbin, etc

#41, Nov 1990: Brown, Egan, McAuley, Royle, Webb, etc

#42, Dec 1990: all-female issue, Fowler, Murphy, Tuttle

#43, Jan 1991: Jeapes, Langford, Newman/Byrne, Shaw, etc

#44, Feb 1991: Brown, Christopher, Egan, Siddall, etc

#45, Mar 1991: Baxter, Holdstock, Landis, Stableford, etc

#46, Apr 1991: Beckett, McAuley, Mapes, Moorcock, etc

#47, May 1991: special Aboriginal issue, Ellison, Pohl, etc

#48, Jun 1991: Egan, Griffith, Kilworth, Newman/Byrne, etc

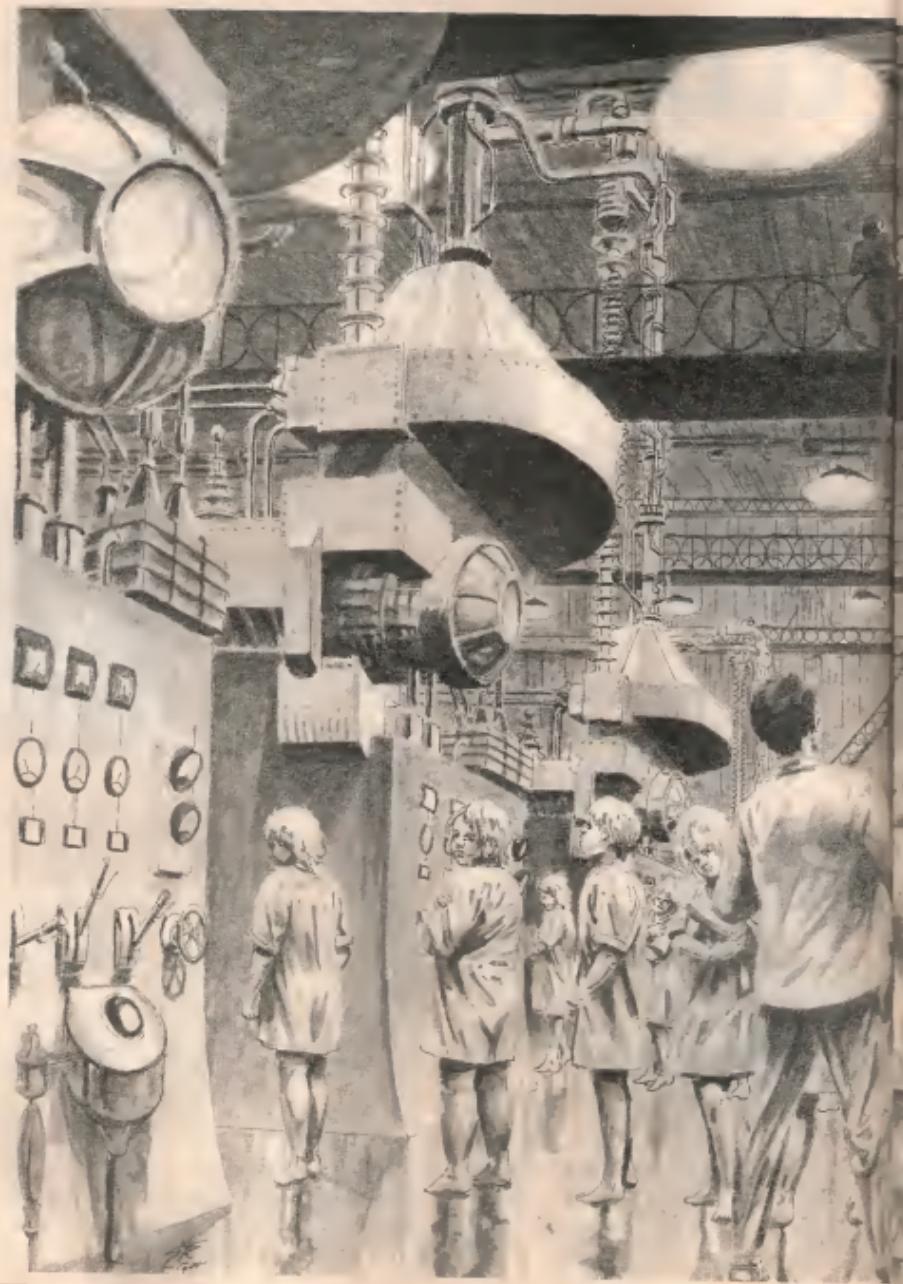
#49, Jul 1991: Baxter, Gribbin, Hand, Robinson, Webb, etc

#50, Aug 1991: Egan, Griffith, Index to first 50 issues, etc

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# THE HUNGER AND ECSTASY OF VAMPIRES

BY BRIAN STABLEFORD

*Author of "The Magic Bullet"  
"The Bad Seed"*

Illustrated by SMS

## PART ONE

### Prologue

As dawn's first light tinted the sky Duval and Uzanne walked across the lawn to meet Mourier's seconds. One of Mourier's men opened the box to display the ancient pistols resting within. The other took Duval to one side, saying 'Is all this necessary? Monsieur Mourier had no intention of causing mortal offence. His mention of the girl's name was not intended to insult *Monsieur le Comte*'.

'*Monsieur le Comte*' has been pursued by evil rumours through half the capitals in Europe.' Duval replied. 'He is able to ignore jests of an ordinary kind, but he will not hear Laura Vambery's name mentioned in this connection. He feels that unless he responds to your friend's carelessness others might feel comfortable in making such insinuations.'

Mourier's man sighed. The pistols were offered to the combatants, and the selection made. The two gentlemen took their measured paces. *Monsieur le Comte* was not the taller of the two, but he seemed to Duval to be the more commanding figure. He was said to be an accomplished mesmerist, and in spite of the fact that there was nothing intimidating about his gaze Duval found it easy to believe. The man seemed to be in a kind of trance, as if his mind had slipped into some uncommon mode of consciousness which permitted absolute concentration. The manner in which he turned to face his opponent was smoothly mechanical.

Mourier did not even bother to raise his arm to the horizontal. He discharged his pistol

harmlessly. No flicker of a smile passed across the face of *Monsieur le Comte*. His own pistol was raised and pointed at his opponent's heart, but he let the barrel fall until it was pointing at the spot from which the two men had stood back-to-back. He fired.

Mourier fell clutching his throat.

Duval could not restrain a moan of astonishment. Even when he realized belatedly that the missile must have struck a stone, he could not help but wonder whether *Monsieur le Comte* might actually have aimed at the stone, calculating that the ricochet would strike his opponent. It was impossible – and yet *Monsieur le Comte* seemed quite impulsive. Neither surprise nor alarm was evident in his stony expression.

Mourier's seconds ran forward and vainly attempted to stem the flow of blood from the wound which had opened Mourier's windpipe. As Duval ran to join them one looked up and said: "Go you fool! Get your man out of Paris. It matters not that the killing was an accident – there will be hell to pay, and if your friend does not want the name of Laura Vamberg bandied about in open court he had better not set foot in France again."

Dazed and fearful, Duval obeyed – but it took all of his and Uzanne's strength to drag the man away. It was as if the reputed mesmenst had himself been mesmerized by the sight of his victim's coursing blood.

The only word *Monsieur le Comte* spoke as his seconds bundled him into his carriage, was "Laura!"

## — I —

"Do you know Edward Copplestone?" Oscar Wilde asked me as he sipped absinthe from his glass. "We were dining at Roche's in Soho, but our host made no objection to the absinthe, which I had smuggled in from Paris. An Ideal Husband had just started its run, to universal acclaim, and Wilde could do no wrong within those or any other walls."

I had been less than a month in London, and knew hardly anyone, so I denied it almost without thinking.

"He dines here sometimes," said Wilde, "but he cannot really be considered a member of our set. He is a great traveller, and tells extravagant tales of his adventures in parts of the world of which most of us have never heard. Some of his stories may even be true, although that hardly matters. He is the only man I know who can speak with casual familiarity about the hinterlands of Siberia and the Mongol lands."

That struck a chord. There was another man I knew who was widely travelled in the Far East, and was overfond of telling dubious traveller's tales.

"Perhaps I have heard the name," I conceded, uncertainly.

"You will find it extensively acknowledged in the notes and bibliographies of Tylor's *Primitive Culture* and Frazer's *Golden Bough*," said Wilde airily – although I suspected that he had read neither book. "He is a self-supposed expert on primitive religion and magic with particular reference to shamanistic cults, but by no means a Dryasdust. Quite a dreamer in his way. Rumour has it that he is no stranger to the opium dens of Limehouse, and rumour can usually be trusted – except, of course, when it turns its attention to me."

This news was mildly reassuring. It was entirely probable that such a man might know Arminius Vamberg, but Vamberg was unlikely to have gone out of his way to pour out his troubled heart to a man reputed to be a dope fiend. Like most sober madmen of impeccable reputation Vamberg had little

tolerance of delusions born of conscious artifice or those accused of courting them.

"Why do you ask whether I know Copplestone?" I enquired. "Because he has written me a curious letter saying that he has a very strange report to make and would be grateful for my presence. He says that he considers me one of the very few intelligent and open-minded men in London – I cannot imagine who else he has in mind – and that he would prize my opinion of what he has to say most highly. He requests me if possible, to bring an acquaintance as wise and as imaginative as myself. It is a description which could hardly apply to Bosie or Robbie, and so I thought of you. Will you come with me, if you are not busy? The invitation is for tomorrow evening."

"You hardly know me," I murmured. "How do you know that I meet the stated requirements?" I suspected that Wilde had only thought of me because I happened to be dining with him that evening.

"I was impressed the first time we met in Paris," he said. "You seemed to have a view of the world of men so clear and so cynical that I could hardly believe you were part of it. It is true that we have never talked at length about deep matters, but I am always impulsive in my judgments and I am very rarely wrong. Will you come?"

I agreed to go with him. How could I possibly have refused? In any case, I was becoming hungry for new amusement. London seemed unbelievably dull after Paris, which I had left with such a sudden wrench. It is never a good idea for an individual of my kind to stay in one place for long, but I never regretted leaving a city more than I regretted leaving Paris. On the other hand London was not entirely devoid of advantages. One could buy a slumgull for a shilling, and a passably pretty one at that, we who are obliged by restless nature and the harrassment of vile slanders to be forever on the move must be grateful for every opportunity which a city has to offer.

"Who else will be there?" I asked, curiously.

"I really have no idea. The only other name Copplestone mentions in his letter to me is Bram Stoker's – and that is only to say that Stoker is in Ireland just now, and cannot possibly come. Copplestone does not explain why he thinks Stoker might have been a suitable candidate for inclusion, personally, I have always considered his mind to be conspicuously second-rate."

I had laid down my fork rather abruptly at the first mention of Stoker's name. Wilde must have observed my reaction. "Do you know Stoker at all?" "He is Henry Irving's factotum."

"I have never met him," I said in a neutral tone.

"I have seen little of him lately myself," said Wilde, "although I was a regular visitor to his home when he first moved to London. He was at Trinity before me, you know. He was still working in Dublin when I went up. My father befriended him, and even my mother condescended to like him a little, but he married a girl of whom I was exceedingly fond and I was never able to forgive his temerity. The fact that we are now in rival camps, theatrically speaking, only serves to add new insult to the old injury."

I was not in the least interested in the petty politics of the English theatre. I knew, though, that Bram Stoker was one of the people Vamberg had talked to when he was in London, if he and Copplestone were acquainted, that considerably increased the probability that Copplestone was another. After what had happened in Paris I wanted to steer well clear of anyone who might have occasion to mention the name of Laura Vamberg – but I had already accepted Wilde's invitation.

tion, and it seemed that Stoker would not actually be present. I thought it best to change the subject.

'Shall we share a carriage?' I asked. 'I would be happy to collect you, if you wish. Where does Copplestone live?'

'On the south side of Regent's Park. Yes, I'd be grateful if you could collect me from the Haymarket, it will be easier to tear myself away from my friends' duties and admirers if I know that I am eagerly awaited by a stern aristocrat. We are expected at eight. I do hope that it will be amusing. Travellers' tales have become far less interesting since Stanley let so much dismal light into the delicately dark heart of Africa, and the steady march of geographical science is slowly strangling the spirit of wild romance, but if there is any forgotten corner of the globe still rich with gorgeous mystery Ned Copplestone is more than likely to have found it. If he intends to test our credulity, we may be reasonably sure that it will be well and truly tested, perhaps to destruction.'

I put my reservations firmly aside, and resolved to do my very best to play the part which had been allocated to me. That of a man of the world, clear-sighted and open-minded. I little suspected what unprecedented demands that role would make of me in the nights which followed.

## — 2 —

I called for Wilde at the appropriate hour but he was – as always – late. I had to sit in my carriage for a quarter of an hour, watching the crowds go by.

The famous London fog had condescended to leave the city unblanketed for once, and the frost had not yet begun to glitter upon the pavements. The chestnut-roasting season was well past by now and most of the brazier-men were hawking baked potatoes, whose odour was not quite so astringent. The crowd was as good a quality as one could expect to find in London out of season, but they seemed a tawdry gaggle by comparison with the excited throngs of Paris's Latin Quarter. My mood was such that they seemed more than usually like cattle trooping to the barn, or laying hens milling about their carelessly-scattered corn. I was glad when Wilde finally consented to appear.

As we bowed along Regent Street, Wilde lost himself in some interminable anecdote, and for once his brilliance seemed slightly off-key, but he was in such good heart that he slowly roused me from my torpor of indolence. By the time we reached the fringes of the park I was ready to face the challenge of the long winter night. Inevitably, we were the last to arrive, although my coachman had continued to make up some of the time we had lost by showing his usual scant regard for the convenience of other road-users.

Wilde's enthusiasm seemed to falter slightly when he saw the remainder of the company gathered in Copplestone's waiting-room. He wondered aloud what judgments had been made of their intelligence by way of polite enticement, but he hastened to introduce me to Copplestone.

Mercifully, the professor showed no flicker of recognition at the mention of my name.

Copplestone was a tall, gaunt man who had doubtless been more solidly-built in his younger days but seemed to find the advancing years uncommonly burdensome. His complexion seemed curiously jaundiced and his handshake was far from firm. Politeness forbade me from saying so but he really did not look well, and I wondered whether he ought to have postponed his story-telling until he had recovered more

of his colour and strength.

I had to concur with Wilde's unvoiced judgment that our fellow-guests did not appear at first glance to be a coterie of the most intelligent and open-minded men in England. They seemed, in fact, to comprise an assembly of eccentrics – but there were probably some among them who felt that Wilde and I increased the bizarreness of the gathering. Wilde proved, once he had removed his coat, to be dressed as flamboyantly as usual, although the green carnation in his lapel was made of silk and crêpe paper. Being a foreigner, and a Count to boot, I needed no artificial aids to appear exotic in English eyes.

While Copplestone introduced me to the others I searched anxiously for any sign or symptom which might testify to the arrival in London of scurrilous gossip, but there was nothing. If any of them had heard of the Mouner affair they were models of discretion.

The first man to whom I was presented was a stout and stolid doctor who had served in India. He seemed a man of common sense rather than exceptional cleverness, but he was the only man present who had been long acquainted with Copplestone, who referred to him as an 'invaluable supporter' and 'unwilling collaborator'. I gathered that the doctor had his own reservations about our host's physical condition.

Like Wilde, the doctor had been invited to bring a companion, and the man who accompanied him was tall and distinguished, though not particularly well-dressed. He seemed grave to the point of melancholy, and I was struck by the apparent acuity of his grey eyes. Nothing was said concerning his station in life.

I was then introduced to two young men. The first was a study in contradictions; he was not thin, but the peculiar softness of his flesh gave the impression that he had recently been very lean indeed and was now filling out for the first time. His complexion was naturally pale, but he paled very easily, and a hectic flush seemed to be continually ebbing and flowing from his cheeks. There was a feverish glint in his eye which suggested that he was not entirely well, although he was by no means as debilitated as our host. It was evident that Copplestone had never clapped eyes on him before, and that it was his companion to whom the professor had actually written.

The other young man was dark and curly-haired, with perhaps a touch of Creole about him. Copplestone explained that he had but recently returned to London after spending some time as a schoolmaster in Derbyshire, but that Wilde knew him slightly and would doubtless be glad to see him again. Wilde obediently pantomimed the pleasure of an old acquaintance joyously renewed, but it did not seem to me that their friendship could ever have been intimate. Wilde met so many young men. I judged from snippets of their conversation that the two young men were not very well acquainted with one another, but that they had many interests in common, including biological science. Both had now chosen to devote themselves to the precarious life of the pen.

The one man in the room who presented incontrovertible evidence to the naked eye that he was older than Copplestone seemed to be in his mid-60s, his flowing beard was white, but he was still healthy. He was a man of science whose name I ought perhaps to have recognized, but science has always seemed to me to be very much a day-time product, and those who invariably keep late hours – as I do – tend to be thrust more often into the company of men of Wilde's stripe. Copplestone did not say whether his title was a baronetcy or a knighthood earned by public service, he did, however, men-

tion that the old gentleman was as well-known for his exploits in association with the Society for Psychical Research as for more material work.

The final member of the party, who had been brought as a companion by the white-haired man of science, was a dark-haired man of similar vocation. Copplestone seemed to think that we might get along famously together, presumably because we both had European accents, but it was obvious to the two of us, if to no one else, that we came from nations which had so little in common as never even to have fought a war. In any case, the man explained that he was an American by adoption and had renounced his European identity in order to give his allegiance entirely to the American spirit of free enterprise. I was not sure exactly what this implied, but I gathered that it had something to do with the profits one could make out of the sale of patents.

I was interested to note that Copplestone had invited no clergymen nor anyone of the legalistic turn of mind. To my mind, that was evidence that he had an altogether sensible notion of trust and trustworthiness. He also had the grace to feed his guests well, and to offer them a burgundy of very tolerable vintage before setting out to tax their credibility. I, as was my habit, ate little and drank less, although I made a tolerable show of participation in the pleasures of the meal. It was not until the port was being passed that the professor introduced the serious business of the evening.

— 3 —

"Some of you," said Copplestone, "know something about the studies which have been my life's work. My published writings on tribal magic and divination have always been scrupulously sceptical, but in private I have pursued the shyer truths which lie hidden in the undergrowth of superstition. I have been particularly interested in the various means used by tribal magicians to obtain knowledge of the future. I have seen enough to convince me that there are indeed some men who have the innate gift of foresight, and that there are chemical methods by which such natural gifts may be enhanced. I have long thought it probable that the application of scientific method to the study of such chemical compounds would produce a way of inducing more accurate and more far-reaching visions of futurity."

In saying this, I remain well aware of certain philosophical problems which arise in connection with the notion of pre-cognition, and of certain psychological problems which inevitably confuse the visionary process. If the principles of causality which we have recognized since Newton's time are true, however, then the future must be, in principle, foreseeable and predictable. If the future flows from the present by virtue of inviolable physical laws, it must do so according to a destiny mapped out since time immemorial — and if the future really is mappable, then there must be a sense in which it already exists, not in the uncertain fog of the speculative imagination, but in actuality."

The white-bearded man leaned forward at this point and opened his mouth to protest, but Copplestone held up a hand to forestall him. "I am aware of the paradoxes which confound the discussion of such ideas," he said, "but I have always desired to make an experiment to test the case. It seemed to me, on the basis of my studies of drug-enhanced pre-cognition in tribal societies, that these magicians sometimes did obtain true knowledge of the future, but were almost never able to

profit from it. One reason for this, I perceived, was that the true knowledge which they obtained was invariably alloyed with extraneous material which frequently led to misinterpretation. After long study I concluded that the organ of foresight — the sixth sense" if you will admit the term — is that which engages in the ordinary business of *dreaming*, and that its sensory function is confused by other expressive functions linked to the passions. In brief our usually meagre powers of pre-cognition are so polluted, perverted and confused by our hopes, fears and fancies that it is difficult to separate truth from fantasy until the event which was dimly foreseen actually comes to pass, thus revealing the previously-hidden meaning of the pre-cognitive vision."

"It was evident to me from my extensive studies of shamanistic and related practices that the enhancement of visionary pre-cognition by appropriate drugs could not entirely filter out this psychological pollution, no matter how powerfully the compounds increased the power of the sensory function, but I hoped that it might be minimized if the optimum combination of drugs could be found. Each of the tribes I have studied has to rely on the bounty of nature to supply enhancing drugs. The Siberians use agaric mushrooms, the Mexicans use *peyotl*, the Mongolians use opium derivatives. I, on the other hand, had the advantage of being able to collect and combine all these different kinds of compounds, refining and modifying them using the recently-evolved techniques of organic chemistry. This was what I set out to do: to discover the mechanics of a modern Delphic oracle, more powerful than any known to history. By this means I hoped to discover, among other things, whether what I had long taken for granted was actually true: whether the future glimpsed by authentic seers is, in fact, an immutable future of *destiny* which they are quite unable to affect in any way despite their foresight of it, or whether it is merely a future of *contingency*, which might yet be altered or averted if they were able to act upon their pre-cognition."

He paused, and rang a bell to summon his manservant. The servant immediately brought in a large tray, on which were set a wooden rack holding test-tubes and glass-stoppered vials and a manilla envelope.

"These," said Copplestone, indicating the test-tubes, "are the various vision-enhancing drugs which were my raw materials. Here" — at this point he touched one of the sealed vials which was marked with a ring of red paint — "is the best of the many mixtures which I made from them. The complex series of treatments to which I submitted the various compounds is carefully set out in a formula which I have placed in this envelope. My experiments have taken their toll of my health and I fear that I may have done myself irreparable damage in the course of my expeditions, but in order that my discoveries may be available to other interested parties I shall give the formula to my good friend Dr Watson. I will gladly give the remainder of the compound to any one of you who might care to volunteer to follow where I have led. There is enough for a single moderate dose."

Copplestone gave the envelope to the doctor, who dutifully put it in the inner pocket of his jacket. "Perhaps, Doctor," the professor said, "You would be kind enough to tell the others what you observed while you have attended me these last few days."

The doctor seemed uncomfortable, but he nodded his head. "I observed Professor Copplestone on three separate occasions," he said. "On each occasion I watched him inject the drug whose remnant you see in that vial into his arm, and

I did not leave him until its effects had worn off. After taking the drug Copplestone fell into a deep sleep, which quickly gave way to an unusual form of coma. His heart slowed to some 28 beats per minute and his body temperature fell by 12 or 14 degrees. His body suffered a loss of weight amounting to about three stones, although its dimensions were not altered commensurately and the loss was temporary, the greater part of it returning when he awoke.

"What a pity," Wilde murmured in my left ear. "Copplestone might otherwise have hawked his discovery as a convenient cure for obesity."

The doctor frowned and continued doggedly. "This condition persisted for approximately three hours on each occasion, although the professor increased the dosage at each stage. As the end of each period approached, the professor's body was subject to tremors, which increased considerably in violence over the course of the three experiments. On the third occasion I feared that the convulsions might cause his heart to stop. When the professor regained consciousness he was very weak. It would be unwise in the extreme, in my opinion, for the professor to attempt any further experiments along these lines – and anyone who is prepared to give serious consideration to Copplestone's invitation to continue this work must bear in mind that he might do himself considerable harm."

The professor seemed quite unperturbed by this warning. "Thank you," he said. "I will not bore you all with a lengthy account of my preliminary experiments, nor with any elaborate presentation of my discoveries in organic chemistry. As to the nature of the mechanism involved in the process of precognition, even I can only speculate. However, Sir William will bear me out when I say that there is now an abundance of evidence that the mind is capable of extending its function beyond the body, producing in the process what we normally call *apparitions*?"

The white-bearded man of science nodded. The evidence for the survival of the mind after death and its ability to formulate a fragile envelope for the purpose of earthly manifes-

tation is overwhelming," he agreed.

"Not all apparitions are vestiges of that post-mortem kind," said Copplestone. "as my story will demonstrate. The naturally-occurring compounds traditionally employed to induce visions are limited in scope, and the perceptions they permit are invariably distorted, but such compounds do indeed allow the mind to extend its perceptive range in both space and time. Space and time are, of course, merely two different aspects of the unitary fabric of the cosmos. Perception of any kind would be impossible without some kind of physical presence, so projections of this kind require the synthesis of a body of sorts, sometimes misleadingly called an *astral body*. The compound which I have perfected increases the powers of the natural compounds considerably, and the conscious control which I was able to exercise over my remote manifestation was greatly enhanced."

"You don't care to tell us, I suppose," said the naturalized American rather rudely, "what will win the Derby this year?"

"Alas," said Copplestone, "my compound is so very powerful that it would require an impractical precision of dosage to travel 60 years, let alone six months, and I suspect that it would be impossible to remain in such a near future for more than a split second. In order to achieve a vision of reasonable coherency and to take advantage of the conscious control which this compound allows, one must work in terms of thousands or tens of thousands of years."

The pale young man was scowling. He muttered something hardly audible, which included the word *plagiarism*. His companion placed a soothing hand on his wrist, bidding him be patient and listen.

"My sketchy explanations have clearly strained your credulity too far," said Copplestone, looking around at the uneasy faces which confronted him.

"I don't believe in your damned native seers," said the American brusquely. "and I don't believe in Crookes' apparitions either, although he's promised to show me a few while I'm here. I believe in causality, and I accept that *in principle*



"WE CAME BEFORE VERY LONG TO A CLEARING"

the future might be foreseen, but —

'That is surely certain,' the pale young man put in. 'The future is determined, and hence potentially discoverable, at least to the extent that we can gather the relevant data.'

'I agree also,' said his curly-haired companion swiftly. 'The origin of motion, which was the primal Act of Creation, must already have contained the plan of universal evolution.'

'But what of free will?' asked the British scientist. 'Men have the power to choose what they will do, and their choices determine the shape of their own futures. The future of mankind will be the sum of those choices, not the product of any merely mechanical laws. Consciousness is immune to the laws of causality which apply to inert objects. There are such things as premonitory dreams, but they are warnings of what may happen, not glimpses of something immutable that already exists.'

'I agree with Crookes, at least about the freedom of the will,' said the doctor gruffly. 'Even if human beings are part of some unfolding plan, they have the power to alter it. We were not impelled here tonight by some irresistible force of necessity, and not one of us really doubts that he might be somewhere else entirely if he had pleased him to go.'

'Neither Milton nor Mill could find a contradiction here,' said Wilde mildly. 'Both would argue that our choices are real, and yet their outcomes would be known with perfect certainty to an omniscient mind. Yes, they would argue, we have the power of choice — but the choices we make are caused by our characters and interests, and are therefore predictable.'

I noticed that Wilde did not offer an opinion of his own, but was content to introduce the relevant ideas of others. The doctor's grey-eyed companion made no effort to intervene in the discussion, even when a momentary silence fell.

Dr Copplestone turned to me, and said: 'Do you have an opinion, sir?'

'I do,' I said flatly. 'I hold that there is an inescapable destiny that faces us all, and the universe itself. It is death. Perhaps we have the power to delay our course, or attain to the end by different routes, but in the final analysis there is no other absolute.'

'Death is not the end,' said the pillar of the Society for Psychical Research. 'That is proven: we need not doubt it.'

The excitable young man shook his head vigorously, but he had discretion enough not to raise his reedy voice in protest.

Copplestone lifted a placatory hand. 'Enough, gentlemen,' he said. 'When I have told you my story, you might be better informed to carry this argument forward.' His tired eyes shone with reflected firelight, and he suddenly seemed to me to be sad as well as debilitated, almost as if the world which had once been home to him had turned traitor, and cast him into some private hell of unbelonging.

I felt an altogether unaccustomed pang of sympathy.

— 4 —

The first subjective sensations induced by the compound, Copplestone said, 'are dizziness and disorientation. As the drug spreads through the bloodstream the mind is invaded by images of a bizarre and incoherent fashion. If I could only train myself to concentrate upon a few elements of the torrent, useful information might be derived therefrom, but I have not so far managed to master the trick. After a time, however, the flood of inchoate images eases, and there is a process of settlement which corresponds with the formation of what I shall call a *timeshadow*. This is an actual, corporeal entity, but it is

considerably less substantial than an ordinary body. My timeshadow was not sufficiently attenuated to pass through solid walls, although the much fainter shadow-selves projected by means of naturally-occurring drugs might be — but I shall leave further discussion of that topic until later.'

'The time which elapsed while the good doctor was standing watch over my unconscious body and the time experienced by my timeshadow did not run in parallel. A timeshadow's attenuation has a temporal as well as a physical aspect; the actual proportion varies according to the dosage — and thus in proportion to the time-difference.'

When the world about me first came into clear focus I found myself on a lightly-wooded hillside. The sun, which stood high in the sky, seemed identical to the one with which we are all familiar, but the trees were not the familiar trees of the English countryside. The green of their leaves was more vivid and their bark was lustrous, as if varnished. I could hear birdsong, but I caught only the most fleeting glimpses of the birds themselves as they fluttered from crown to crown and could not easily compare them to the species I knew. I was surprised to find no trace whatsoever of the city of London, for I had assumed that I would remain in the same place while moving in time. Either that assumption was false, or I was so far displaced in time that all vestiges of the world's greatest city had been quite obliterated.

'Not without difficulty, I raised my hand to place it before my face. I half-expected that I might find it transparent, or at least translucent, but it was opaque and lined in a familiar fashion. I looked down, and found that I was not naked. I was wearing a thin white tunic and trousers, designed according to no model I had ever actually seen. This seemed to confirm what I believed about the ability of my own mind — without, apparently, any exertion of my conscious will — to interfere creatively with the sensory aspect of the drug's operation. This was not altogether good news. If my sense of modesty could alter the content of my prophetic vision, what might my fears and hopes make manifest?'

'The grass which grew in the open between the trees was as vividly green as the foliage of the trees, but I could not be certain that the difference was in the grass rather than in the sensory apparatus of my unusual corpus. There were a few coloured flower-heads raised above the grass, mostly blue or purple, and there were insects paying court to them, but I did not pause to study the insect-life of the period into which I had come. From my vantage-point half way up the hill I could see a road, and in the distance the outskirts of a town. The distant buildings seemed very clean in the sunlight. Their roofs were tiled in brown and green, their walls pale grey or pastel blue. There were no vehicles on the road but there were people walking in either direction, in pairs or small groups.'

'When I tried to move down the hill I realized why it had required such an effort to raise my hand. A timeshadow may walk, run or jump like any other body but the habits ingrained by ordinary experience must be modified. Although relatively insubstantial a timeshadow seems to its tenant to be heavy and sluggish. I found that the effort normally adequate to take a step forward had to be considerably increased if I were to make headway, but once my timeshadow was in motion it had unusual momentum. My stride was slow but it was also long. I eventually learned to modify my actions to produce a less awkward gait, but the skill came gradually.'

'I made my uncomfortable way down the hill. The people on the road must have caught sight of me, but no one

stopped or turned to stare. It was not until I too was on its strangely smooth surface that I was able to meet anyone's gaze or command attention. The people were dressed even more simply than myself, each in a single garment not unlike a short nightshirt. I could hardly tell whether any one of them was male or female, although they differed in individual appearance as much as we do. Most of them were conspicuously plump, and even the thinnest was certainly not slender by our standards. There were children among them, but none showed any marked sign of old age. While I recovered my breath 12 or 14 people must have passed me by. All of them glanced at me, but only a few looked me up and down. The children seemed most curious — one or two of them pointed at me, and spoke to the adults. I could not understand the language they spoke, but its sounds seemed to me to be softly Oriental. Their complexions were very ruddy, and the blue tracing of veins on their bare forearms seemed very thick and outstanding.

"Why are they so incurious? I wondered. Why are they not as excited by my appearance as men of my world would be if a ghost were to walk down Oxford Street in broad daylight? I tried to speak. My voice was very low, and the words I was trying to form seemed exceedingly hoarse and hollow. The passers-by seemed rather more startled by my voice than by my appearance, but the effect was the opposite of what I had hoped. They speeded up, hurrying on their way. I tried to protest, but it was futile.

I began to walk along the road, heading towards the town. I was soon in its streets, which curved to follow the contours of the gentle slopes but were otherwise very regular in their spacing. The houses differed slightly from one another in size and style, but the overall impression was one of astonishing uniformity. The walls were made out of pale bricks supported and separated by thin layers of mortar, laid with awesomely mechanical regularity. The houses had glazed windows; these were all exactly the same size, as were the doors, which were constructed of the same unfamiliar substance as the window-frames. There seemed to be only one other kind of edifice apart from the houses. These were much larger constructions, like huge low barns, with numerous doors but no windows. At that time I did not see anyone going into or coming out of any of the windowless buildings.

I suppose that I had tacitly expected that the world of the future would be cleaner and more orderly than our own, and that life would have become less chaotic. I had expected, too, to find life more leisurely, but the image with which I was confronted now seemed to take all these things to a discomfiting extreme. As I looked about me at the people in the streets I could see hardly any real evidence of purpose in their movements. No one was in a hurry and no one was carrying anything. Although they moved in groups their conversations were dilatory. There were no vehicles to be seen, nor any domestic animals. The houses had no gardens.

"This does not make sense, I thought. But if it is a fantasy conjured up by my mind and substituted for a much richer reality, what on earth can my mind be about?

I peered into some of the houses. I saw laden tables and chairs drawn up around them, sometimes occupied and sometimes not, but I never saw anyone engaged in any activity except serving or eating food. I saw unfamiliar fruits being eaten with the fingers, and I saw people using spoons to draw various different liquids or solids from bowls, but I never saw a knife or a fork or a plate. I saw no pictures or hangings nor any other kind of ornamentation. I saw no books or shelves. I

saw cribs containing babies, and sometimes heard the babies wailing, but I could detect no signs of distress among the children who were old enough to walk. If the people inside a house became aware that I was looking in they would look back, evincing the same signs of mild alarm that the people on the road had showed when I tried to make contact with them, but they never tried to shoot me away.

"At first I had thought the town pleasant because it was so neat and clean, but it quickly came to seem uncanny. This is not human life I thought, but a mere simulation of it. These are not people, but automata of some kind, which can maintain some pretence of talking and thinking but cannot do these things in any authentic sense. I wondered whether it might be nothing but an illusion conjured up by a jejune imagination, but when I looked at the slowly-setting sun, and the display of colour it created by its effects upon the slightly-humid atmosphere, I could not believe that this was other than an actual world.

Eventually, I became bolder. I went into one of the houses. The inhabitants were seated at the table enjoying a meal, but when I came into the room they stopped immediately, and got up. They twittered at one another in their strange language, and backed up against the wall. The adults extended their arms protectively to the children. When I had come far enough away from the door they went out, leaving me alone with their half-finished repast. In my attenuated form I was not sure that I could taste food properly, and I had not the slightest hunger or thirst, so I contented myself with inspecting the contents of the bowls by eye. Considering that everything else was so simple, the diet which these people enjoyed seemed unusually rich and varied. But where, I wondered, were the fields and orchards which generated this produce? Where were the markets in which it was traded? How was it brought into the houses?

The people of the house had gone out into the street and I watched them through the window to see if they would call for help. They did not. They talked to one another, but not to other passers-by. I went to investigate the other rooms in the house. There were several rooms upstairs, each containing a low bed and a closet in which half a dozen tunics hung. There was a bathroom downstairs and a separate water-closet. The pipes which carried the water were not metallic. The taps in the bathroom were mere levers. The kitchen had a sink, but no range, fireplace or boiler. There were cupboards for bowls, spoons and foodstuffs, but no cooking utensils. There were three dumb-waiters whose shafts disappeared downwards, but I concluded after assiduous searching that the house had no basement or cellar that could be reached from the ground floor.

"It is all mere surface, I thought. The whole town is a toy, whose appearances are controlled from below by hidden mechanisms — but by whom, and for what purpose? These were the questions which preoccupied my mind as I went out into the gathering dusk.

## — 5 —

As Copplestone paused I glanced at Wilde, whose lips were pursed. "These are hardly brave and gaudy lies," he whispered. They are so anaemic as to be unworthy even of a professor.

I smiled thinly. "One could have hoped for a more exciting tale, I admitted; "but it has the ring of sincerity and there is a mystery of sorts in it."

Copplestone had already resumed his narrative. "I half-expected that nightfall would put an end to activity within the

town but I was wrong. I observed that many more people were emerging onto the streets. As the sky became black and the stars began to shine through, the streets lit up. I do not mean that lamps were lit; it was the actual fabric of the roadway which began to glow with a white, cold luminosity. I could see a similar light within some of the windows of the houses. I inferred that the light was a kind of artificial phosphorescence. A half-moon had risen above the eastern horizon, and was slowly climbing higher. I studied its face closely and was oddly relieved to find it quite unchanged. However many thousands of years had passed since the era of my birth, some things remained constant and inviolable.

"As the people in my immediate vicinity began to move past me, it seemed that for the first time they moved with a purpose. All were moving in the same direction, as though they had a common destination. Lit from below as they were, their marching figures seemed rather eerie. Curiosity impelled me to fall into step with them. I soon perceived that the crowd was heading for the nearest of those larger buildings with which the houses were interspersed. I saw that all of its many doors now stood open, and that an orderly queue of people was forming at each one. I took a place in one of them and waited for those before me to enter."

"The light inside the barn-like building was as wan and white as that which illuminated the roadway, but it shone down from the ceiling. The building was crowded with machinery of some kind, much of which loomed up to a height considerably above that of a man. The vast room reverberated with a low, humming sound, but there was no whining as of turning wheels and no hiss of steam. It was, I guessed, an electrical hum, and I concluded that the whole town must run on electrical power generated in some subterranean region."

The queues which remained as orderly within the building as without, extended into narrow corridors between the massive machines, these vanishing from my sight. There were glass-faced dials set in the sides of the machines at eye-level, and levers and switches positioned as though for human arms, but no one made any attempt to read the indicators or activate the levers. There was a slight pulse in the floor beneath my feet, which implied that there was more machinery at a lower level, and I could see several flights of steps leading downwards. There were also upward flights of steps made out of what looked like wrought iron, leading to catwalks which ran all around the inner walls. These were connected by a sparse network of railed walkways which bridged the gap between the longer sides of the rectangular space. Distributed about these catwalks, leaning casually on the guard-rails, were a dozen human figures distributed in groups of two or three. As soon as I caught sight of them they commanded my attention. Here, I thought, are the masters of this vast *chamber*!

The figures on the walkways were mere silhouettes, lumped against the evenly-lit ceiling, and I could not hear a word of their conversation but I felt sure that they were not of the same kind as the docile cattle which swarmed around me. Their postures were lazy, their attitudes too obviously negligent. They were evidently in charge of whatever was happening here, although their presence was hardly necessary, the process was working automatically. I was tempted to step out of line in order to make contact with the *real* inhabitants of this strange future world, but I hesitated. The line in which I had taken my place had now progressed so far that I was on the point of entering the narrow corridor between the ranks of

machines. I would soon be able to see where the queue was heading, and what the people in it had come to do. I decided that there would be time enough to go upstairs when I had satisfied my curiosity on that point.

The corridor extended for about 40 yards between two rows of compartments or stalls. Every few seconds someone would emerge from one or other of these stalls and the person at the head of the queue would take their place. When the man ahead of me took his turn I went with him to watch what he did. Within the dimly-lit compartment there was an outward-facing chair, on which the man sat down. He could see that I was watching him, and he hesitated momentarily, but the inhibiting effect of my presence was insufficient to deflect him from his purpose. He reached behind him to draw a long transparent tube through an aperture in the wall. On the end of it was a metal device headed by a slender needle, from which dangled a number of threads. Hitching up the skirt of his brief tunic, the man casually thrust the point of the needle into the flesh inside his thigh, and with practised ease he distributed the threads so that they adhered to his skin and held the needle in place. He then pressed a small switch set in the wall behind him, and sat back listlessly. He did not bother to watch the blood which rapidly filled the transparent tube and disappeared into the wall behind him.

I can hardly convey the horror which began to grow in me. The bovine nonchalance of it all was quite chilling.

Another stall became vacant further down the line. The woman who had been standing behind me in the queue showed no disinclination to go to it, nor any resentment of my failure to take my turn. The man looked up at me with an expression I could not evaluate. As my horror increased I began to see new significance in the fact that all the townspeople seemed so plump and so full-complexioned, and so curiously docile. It burst upon me with all the force of revelation that this barn-like edifice was indeed a barn and that these humans I had liked in my mind to cattle were exactly that: domesticated creatures of little intelligence and less independence, who came to be 'milked' each evening, giving a good yield of the good red blood which they had been selectively bred to produce superabundantly. I understood belatedly that the 'houses' in which these people lived were not really houses at all, but mere animal-shelters, whose plumbing and heating had perforce to be controlled from elsewhere, by the herdsmen who kept such livestock.

They are vampires! I thought, with a thrill of dread. The masters of this world are vampires, which feed on human blood. Nor are they predators which covertly haunt the night. But careful farmers. They have enslaved mankind and reduced the human species to a status hardly above that of the goats and sheep which the earliest human nomads kept.

Copplestone paused again briefly, as the memory of it made him shudder. I could see sweat standing on his brow, and his colour had grown worse. I wondered whether he had enough strength to reach the end of his story – and whether I had the stomach to hear him out. I had not expected this, how could I? I dare say that my own colour was as unprepossessing as Copplestone's: it was all I could do to keep from trembling with wrath. Had all this, I wondered, been set up expressly for my discomfort? Was it all a charade planned to taunt and distress me?

"As I realized what was happening," Copplestone continued, I shrank back against the partition. I wondered what might happen if the watchers on the catwalk overcame their

tedium sufficiently to notice that I was there. I looked up to see how many of the silhouetted figures were visible from where I stood, but I was shielded by the surrounding walls from all but two of them, who were facing the other way. I began making plans as to how best to make my exit from the building. My earlier enthusiasm to make contact with these masters had evaporated now that I knew that they kept other human beings as livestock.

The man in the chair detached the adhesive strips, withdrew the needle, and held it carefully while it was drawn back into the wall. He took a piece of lint from a dispenser and used it to mop up the bead of blood which formed upon his thigh, discarding it into a repository set in the wall. As another came to take his place I slid out of the way. This one was a girl, seemingly no more than ten years old. I had no wish to distress her, nor to watch her making her donation of blood, so I followed the man.

At the far end of the corridor there was an open space much like the one from which I had come. The nearest door was only 15 paces away, but so was the nearest ascending staircase and standing on the seventh step of that stairway, looking down at the people who had done their duty and were going home, was a lone man clad in black. Immediately I caught sight of him I attempted to step back into the corridor to hide myself behind the angle of the wall, but it was too late he had seen me – and was in no doubt that I was different from the rest. The absurd clothing which my scrupulous psyche had seen fit to invent for the sake of my modesty betrayed me. I could not make out his features very well, but it was apparent that he was by no means as inimical as the people I had tried to speak to on the road. This was a thinking being – but I had every reason to believe that he was no more like me than those who had come here to be milked of their blood.

*'However human his form might be, I thought, he is a monster.'*

I ran forwards, towards one of the open doors which allowed the human cattle egress from the building. I had not practised running, and the moment I began to move in a new way my former limpen awkwardness returned in full measure. The strides I took were slow and painful. Confusion amplified my panic but the more effort I exerted to hurl myself forward the more ungainly I seemed to become. I began to fall, and experienced a sharp thrill of terror. I could not regain my balance. The impact jolted me but did not knock me out. I scrambled to regain my feet. By the time I had done so, the man from whom I fled had come down from the stair and was moving swiftly towards me. I could see his face clearly now. It was paler than my own, save for the lips, which seemed red and full. His eyes had a hint of luminous green about them, they seemed manifestly inhuman.

I lurched towards the door I could not have reached it had not my pursuer been impeded, but his path crossed that of a woman who had emerged from the corridor to his left. She walked dazedly in front of him and they collided. She let out a wail of anguish as she realized too late what had happened. He tripped, and fell as heavily as I had howling as he hit the floor. Desperation lent me the still which I needed, and I managed to accelerate my progress towards the doorway. I hurled myself through it just ahead of another of the cattle-men. It was not until the cooler air struck my face that it occurred to me to wonder what to do next. Where

could I run to? Where could I hide?

I stumbled away from the doorway, determined to reach the shadows beyond the illuminated strip of roadway, but, as I did so I realized that the night was filled with sound, which came from above rather than below. Having taken three or four steps into the darkness beside the roadway I looked up into the starry sky and saw to my astonishment that it was full of shadows, as if a great flock of huge and monstrous bats were wheeling above the town. For a moment I thought the flying things really were predatory haunters, but they were not alive. They carried lights to signal their position to one another, and their wings were rigid. It was impossible to make out their exact shapes, although they were no more than a few hundred feet above the ground, but the thrumming noise of their engines was unmistakably similar to the sound which had filled the huge barn. They were machines.

*'In God's name I thought, what mad kind of world is it into which I have been delivered? Sheer confusion must have brought me to a standstill, for I was no longer running. I was impotently staring upwards into the sky when rough hands grabbed me from behind.'*

— 6 —

Copplestone's voice dissolved into a fit of coughing. The doctor rushed to his side, but the professor's trembling grew worse, and it seemed that he was on the brink of some kind of fit. After a brief lapse of time the doctor suggested that the rest of us should move into the smoking-room while he saw to the needs of his patient. He promised that the story would



"THEY WERE MACHINES"

continue when Copplestone was fit enough to tell it.

I found myself moving to the door alongside the young man who had seemed – and still seemed – oddly agitated.

"You do not seem to be enjoying yourself, Mr Wells" I remarked.

I beg your pardon, Count," he said in his awkwardly-distinctive voice. "I am confused. This whole evening has the appearance of being a joke at my expense."

I was startled because I was still wondering whether Copplestone's story might be an elaborate joke at my expense. "How so?" I asked.

"I suspect that Copplestone has read of a series of articles which I contributed to the *National Observer*, couched in the form of a tale told by a time-traveller, concerning his exploration of future time. And yet – he showed no sign that he recognized my name when Shiel introduced me, and Shiel assures me that Copplestone could not possibly have guessed that he would invite me to be his guest. Then again, what is the purpose of this apparent plagiarism? I cannot fathom it."

Nor could I. "Are the resemblances between your story and his really so close that there is no possibility of coincidence?" I asked.

"They are," he said, positively. "My time-traveller uses a machine to transport him into the future rather than a drug, but what my protagonist discovers in the first future era he visits is so similar to what Copplestone has described as to be an evident copy."

I found this news strangely disturbing. "You have also foreseen a future in which the human race serves as the cattle of a race of vampires?"

He blinked in perplexity. "Oh no," he said. "Not vampires. But in my vision of the year 802,701 the human race has divided into two separate species, one of them living mockingly upon the surface enjoying a life of ease while the other lives underground, tending the machinery which sustains the apparent Golden Age. They are you see, the ultimate descendants of the two great classes of our society, the leisured and the labourers. But in my story, the wretched and ugly Morlocks have their revenge upon the lovely Eloi, for they emerge from their caverns by night to prey upon their one-time masters, feeding upon their flesh. Copplestone's story is a simple transfiguration of mine. It is plagiarism – there is no other possible explanation."

"Pardon me," interposed another voice, "but I believe there is." It was the older of the two men of science, Sir William Crookes.

I should be interested to hear it," I murmured, while the young man bridled.

"Even sceptics like my friend Tesla must admit," said the old man, equably, "that it is possible that all men are capable of a degree of precognition. There is evidence that our dreams routinely bring us news of the future, admittedly confused by our own minds with other materials. Must we not admit the possibility that you, Mr Wells, have something of the innate ability which Copplestone's native shamans possess, and that your mind is capable of reaching into the future even without the kind of chemical assistance which Copplestone requires? Not unnaturally you construe your vision as a pure product of your own imagination, but perhaps it is a true – if somewhat blurred – vision of the shape of things to come."

"That is every bit as fantastic as Dr Copplestone's story, Sir William!" he exclaimed.

"Which is," the other pointed out, "every bit as fantastic as

your own."

"But mine is pure invention!"

"If what you said earlier about the future being determined and discoverable is true," I murmured, "there may be no such thing as *pure invention*."

At that moment, Copplestone re-entered the room, seemingly revived and revitalized by whatever treatment the doctor had administered. He suggested to us that we take the seats which had been set out for us around the fireplace. As dutiful guests, Wells, Crookes and I had no option but to postpone our argument while our host resumed his tale.

I was carried by my captors into a curious Underworld," said Copplestone, a little hoarsely. "It was dimly lit, and the light had an odd hue somewhere between blue and violet. It was futile to struggle against the strong arms which held me for I was evidently not much of a burden to my captors. They held me gingerly, as though my insubstantial body felt strange and unpleasant, but there was no prospect of my breaking away. My captors' eyes were very much like cat's eyes, with lenticular pupils. They had full lips, which seemed nearly black rather than red. They were all male but all beardless – and their faces were curiously unblemished. It was impossible to guess how old they might be. Their dark clothing was more elaborate than that worn by the people of the town, but simpler than the suits of our own era."

I reminded myself that my time in this world was strictly limited, and that I was certain to return to my body in due course. From the viewpoint of my captors I would simply vanish into thin air. In the meantime, the task before me was to find out as much as I possibly could about the vampires and their empire of the night. They took me into an extraordinary room, whose walls were mounted with numerous rectangular screens. Most of the screens were inert but four displayed moving pictures of various kinds. One showed several persons in conversation – beings like those who had seized me – while another showed machines in flight, contraptions like those I had seen outside. Beneath the screens were panels decked with countless buttons and switches.

"There were three persons already in the room. When I was brought in they became very excited, two who had been seated instantly stood up. They fired questions at my captors while they moved around me, inspecting me very curiously. They also attempted to fire questions at me, but I could not understand their language and my attempts to reply sounded grotesque. They prodded and poked me in a manner which suggested that they doubted their own senses. After several minutes of animated discussion their attitude changed. Solicitously, they ushered me to a chair situated before one of the screens, and invited me with a mime of exaggerated politeness to sit down. When I had done so, clumsily, one of them began moving his fingers over the control-panel before me, with incredible speed and dexterity.

The image of yet another cat-eyed person appeared on the screen. It was clear from his attitude that my image must have been simultaneously relayed to him. A voice emerged from a disc beneath the screen. There was a long and somewhat confused exchange of staccato conversation between the person on the screen and the persons clustering about me. One of my captors began signalling to me furiously, gesturing with his hand in front of his mouth. I inferred that he wanted me to speak, and I did so, haltingly at first but more fluently as he encouraged me to continue. I said that my name was Copplestone, and pointed at my chest in order to make my meaning

clear I then tried to give some account of the experiment which had brought me here. Whenever I hesitated, my interrogator-in-chief resumed his urgent signing.

"Just as I had mastered the art of walking by dint of practising, so my speech improved by degrees. Within a few minutes I was enunciating clearly enough although my voice still sounded unreasonably deep and slow. After some 12 or 15 minutes the one who had taken charge held up his hand. He then began playing with the control-board again. After a few moments I heard the sound of my own voice emerging from the speaker. I winced at the uncouth tone. Embarrassment left me little space to wonder at the fact that my words had been so accurately recorded – and my wonderment was banished entirely when the recording was interrupted by another voice, which said 'English. Is English.'

I looked up at the image of the man on the screen, but he was not speaking. Like me, he was listening – but he was looking at me eagerly, avid for some response. The voice which had spoken was as hollow and hoarse and distorted as mine, but that was presumably mere imitation. 'English,' I said, correcting the pronunciation. 'The language is English.'

The words were immediately repeated back to me. The voice, I realized, was an echo of my own, presumably produced by a machine which, with the resources I had provided, had contrived to identify the language which I spoke. That was the moment when it finally came home to me what resources these people had – and made me wonder whether they were invaders from some other world who had conquered, subdued and made prey of mankind. The man on the screen spoke, and there was a brief pause before what I assume to be a translation of his words emerged in English from the speaker. 'We understand,' he said. 'Your language is preserved in the memory banks. Where have you come from?'

"My name is Copplestone," I repeated. "I am a timeshadow. My own body lies unconscious." I intended to say in the city of London, in the year 1895, but I never got the chance.

"What is timeshadow?" demanded the other sharply. "Explain!"

"I am a man of the past," I said. "Your world is my future, this timeshadow is the means by which I can look into it."

This was translated, but the person on the screen seemed deeply confused. He uttered a single brief syllable, which the machine rendered into English as 'Impossible.'

"As you can see," I retorted, stiffly it is not impossible. I am here. What kind of man are you?"

"No man," replied the other, with apparent contempt as soon as the machine had translated my words. "We are overmen."

"It was my turn to say 'What are overmen? Explain!'

"It was I think the translation machine itself that responded, not the man on the screen. 'Members of dominant species,' it said. 'End-products of earthly evolution.'

"What year is this?" I asked. "How long has it been since my kind were emperors of the earth? How many thousands of years?"

The man on the screen – or, rather, the overman on the screen – shook his head in bewilderment. I took what further comfort I could from the fact that whatever technical miracles were his to command, the science of casting a timeshadow did not seem to be among them.

"I came to this world," I said, "to see what time would make of *Homo sapiens*, man the wise. I came to see what triumphs and glories lay in store for my own kind. If the earth has passed into the care of overmen who use their fellows as cattle

and milk them of their life-blood, then the news which I must carry back with me is dire and terrible." I added, as my resolution faltered. "I must hope, I suppose, that this is nothing but an opium-dream."

"While he waited for this speech to be translated the person on the screen grew much more thoughtful. When he replied, he spoke in a level tone which the translation-machine reproduced. 'The lovers of daylight are not our kind, not our fellows. In the long-gone days before they became our docile birds, they were our deadliest enemies. Is that truly what you are, a wild and savage *man* from the dawn of history? It seemed that the translation machine was having some slight trouble with the concept *man*.

"Some of the men of my time are wild and savage," I told him. "Some, it is said, still have the cannibal habit, but I am a civilized

"I intended to say far more but the world was turning to mist around me, dissolving into darkness. I felt that I was falling into an infinite abyss, and when I eventually awoke again, I was all a-tremble in my true body, and Dr Watson was busy reassuring himself that I was fit and well, or at least alive and sensible."

## — 7 —

Copplestone's voice had remained steady, but his body was now slumped in his armchair in a fashion which suggested that he was on the point of exhaustion. As I looked around I could see that I was not the only one anxious on his behalf. I saw too, that the young man who had spoken to me about the resemblances between Copplestone's tale and his own was very eager to make his complaint generally known but his curly-haired companion restrained him.

"I think Dr Copplestone," said the dark-complexioned young man, "that it might be as well to clear up one puzzling point before we hear the continuation of your story. My friend and I have been struck by the similarity between your account of the far future and a series of speculative articles recently published in the *Notawal Observer*. We cannot help but wonder whether your visionary experience might be reproducing – unwittingly, no doubt – a distorted version of these articles, which you might have read or heard discussed."

I watched Copplestone's face very closely. If it were true, I thought, then the distortions of his tale might also have a commonplace source, and the parts of the story which most interested me might also have been borrowed – unwittingly or not – from Arminius Vambery, presumably via Bram Stoker. The professor, however, seemed genuinely surprised by Mr Shiel's suggestion.

"I have read no such articles," he said. "There are so many periodicals in circulation these days that I can hardly keep track of their titles, let alone their contents. My experiments have taken up almost all of my time these last few months, and I have had little contact with anyone save for my servants and Dr Watson. I certainly do not recall discussing anything of this kind, or hearing it discussed, and I am certain that I would have paid careful attention to any such discussion. There were, I recall, some articles issued a little over a year ago in the *Pall Mall Budget* which Dr Watson did bring to my attention. One was entitled 'The Man of the Year Million,' another 'The Extinction of Man.' I thought them fascinating, but..."

"They too were mine!" the pale young man interposed, unable to keep silent any longer. "All of this is mine!"

"Yours?" Copplestone's amazement seemed sincere enough. "I am sorry then, that I did not recognize your name when you were introduced to me. Your presence here is a happy coincidence."

"It is not entirely coincidental," confessed the pale young man's friend. "I suppose that you contacted me because you remembered my interest in certain matters on which your story has touched, expressed *en passant* in conversations we had before I went to Derbyshire. Having so recently returned, I had no intimate acquaintance I might bring with me, so I wrote to Mr Wells – whom I hardly know, save by reputation – because I knew of his very similar interests. I dare say that there are others here who came with some kind of predisposition to be intrigued. Crookes and Tesla presumably came to hear your accounts of the electrical machinery of the future. Mr Wilde and his friend might well be interested in your visionary method – although I have had some experience of opium myself, and I must say that your experience does not seem to me to have the least resemblance to an opium dream."

"I think he has confused you with Count Stenbock," Wilde whispered to me. "A man born and nursed in the colonies can hardly be expected to be able to tell one Count from another." I forbore to point out that it might be his own reputation which had led the young man to suppose that we had an intimate interest in the quest for *les paradis artificiels*.

"My experience was certainly no opium dream," Copplestone said. "It was careless of me to introduce such a simile. My time machine is a compound of a very different chemical class which sharpens very different sensibilities. I wonder if it is possible that Mr Wells has the kind of natural gift which can perceive the future – albeit dimly – even without such assistance. Except that..."

I saw the white-bearded man of science nod with satisfaction at hearing his own hypothesis repeated, but his companion scowled. Mr Tesla presumably thought that one improbability was now being piled atop another. Given that there was a much more ordinary way by which Mr Wells's ideas could have influenced Dr Copplestone, I was half-inclined to agree with him. And yet Copplestone's story did seem sincere.

Copplestone, after pausing briefly to reflect, began again. "May I ask, sir," he said to the excitable young man, "whether your story continues beyond a point parallel to that which my own has reached?"

In the *National Observer* version, no, Mr Wells replied, "but I have now completed a revised version which is somewhat longer. But even if the continuation of your adventure reproduces that part of the story the similarity might still be accountable. Henley has seen it and half a dozen others. There are a dozen ways the rumour could have got around."

"That is a pity," said Copplestone. "It would have been more interesting had there been no possible way for me to have knowledge of it. I wonder, however, whether our stories will continue to run along parallel paths or whether they diverge. May I ask whether your story deals, after the fashion of your earlier essays, with the man of the year million and the extinction of man?"

"Only the latter," said the young man, a little suspiciously. "The extinction of man *en masse* is, of course, inevitable and must be the end-point of any future history. As the sun gradually fades to a mere ember as it must while it exhausts the fuel of its combustion the surface of the earth will become uninhabitable by life as we know it – and that is how my story

concludes. Men may find habitats elsewhere, of course, but on earth their day will be done in a million years, or a few million at most."

"That is most interesting," said Copplestone, judiciously. "My account of the future also includes the extinction of man, but man's successors continue to thrive. I think that if you will agree to be patient for a while, you might find that any resemblance between your story and mine will disappear by degrees."

"If I may say so," Wilde interposed, mildly, "this digression is unhelpful. There will be time enough to discuss the possible provenance of your story when we have heard it all, and I am perfectly happy – as Mr Wells must surely be – to accept your word that no deliberate borrowing of ideas has taken place."

Mr Wells shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose I should accept the similarity as an endorsement of my own powers of foresight," he muttered, sarcastically. He seemed to take little comfort in the notion that other prophets might come forward – an entire legion of them, if Copplestone's formulae were ever to be published – to testify to the accuracy of his story. There was an understandable conflict between his desire to be reckoned an accurate prophet and his desire to be reckoned an original artist.

"I am glad that Mr Wells has brought the matter of the similarity between my story and his to our attention," Copplestone said, "but I think that we should press on. If there is no objection, I will continue my story."

There was no objection. I was evidently not the only one who did not relish the thought that the business might take all night.

"For the purposes of my second excursion in far futurity I increased the dosage of the drug by a third," Copplestone said. "The after-effects of my first expedition were relatively mild, and I thought the risk justified. I had no way of knowing exactly how far into the future my first expedition had taken me, but I hoped that I would now be able to span several times as many years."

I found myself once again standing on a hillside lit by a warm summer sun. I was reassured by the daylight, but I knew that I would have to face nightfall eventually, and that if the world were still ruled by the vampire race I had encountered in my first expedition I was certain to encounter them again. I was dressed exactly as I had been before. Although my time-shadow was just as cumbersome I now understood how to adapt, and when I began to walk I soon felt reasonably competent and fairly comfortable. While I cultivated a normal gait I practised pronouncing familiar syllables, schooling my voice until I could produce an acceptable version of the English language. I did not suppose for an instant that anyone I met might be able to understand any words I spoke, but I wanted to avoid the embarrassment of seeming stupidly inarticulate.

"After ten or 12 minutes I became aware of the fact that a particular insect, about the size of a house-fly, was always close to my head. I tried to shoot it away, but it evaded my flapping hand, and circled around just beyond my reach. When I walked faster, the insect accelerated. I could not see it with perfect clarity because it was perpetually on the move, but it obviously was not a fly or bee. In the end, I decided to ignore the creature. I came to a sluggish and murky stream, and turned to walk along its bank. I followed the course of the meandering stream until I came to the rim of a little waterfall, where it tumbled into a pool some five feet below. There I saw

a strange figure kneeling to drink from the pool. To my astonishment, I saw that it was a satyr: a male creature with the torso and belly of a man and the hindquarters of a goat.

The creature's head was very hairy and two small horns projected from his forehead. The only thing which did not quite match the classical image of a satyr was his feet which were more massive than a goat's although they seemed as horny as hooves. He was slight of stature and slender in the body, but his face somehow gave the impression of extreme age. *How can this be the future?* I asked myself. *It could not even be the past, into which I might have slipped had my timeshadow been displaced in the wrong direction, for satyrs are figments of the human imagination: creatures born of superstitious fantasy. To encounter fauns as well as vampires is surely proof positive that all this is a mere dream.* My disappointment was, however, alleviated by curiosity. Well, I thought, *If I am removed to Hesiod's Age of Gold, I must make the most of it.*

I must have been staring at the creature for ten seconds before he suddenly became aware of my presence and turned to look up at me. I could not easily read his expression, so I could not tell how astonished he might be by the sight of me, but at least he did not start with alarm and flee in panic. He stood up slowly, and stared at me as steadily as I was staring at him. Then he threw back his head and uttered a loud sound, which seemed far less human than his head or legs – a sound resembling the note of some huge musical instrument like a church organ. I quickly realized that the cry must have been a summons or at least an invitation. From the trees around the clearing other figures appeared.

"In Greek myth, if I remember rightly, fauns and satyrs were exclusively male, and their chief delight was the pursuit of delicately human-seeming nymphs. Here though, there were females of the species too, and children. The females were less shaggy in the shanks, and the hair on their heads was less coarse, but no one seeing them in daylight could possibly have mistaken them for humans. Within the space of a few minutes a company of 13 gathered, five of which were little ones. They did not menace me in any way. Like the one who had summoned them, they simply stared, with frank curiosity. I scrambled down the bank. At the bottom, which I reached rather too hurriedly, I sprawled in a most ungainly fashion. I was not winded, but I could not immediately rise, and one of the fauns approached me tentatively, his hand outstretched. I took it, and he helped me up. I was a foot taller than he, but he was very strong.

"Thank you," I said, letting go of his slender, warm fingers. The sound of my voice so different from his own, did not alarm him. He continued to stare up into my eyes, so intently that I wished I could read his unhuman expression.

The bushes parted again and another creature came out. This one was of another kind. He was much taller than the dwarfish fauns, and far more manlike in the face, but as his hindquarters emerged from the undergrowth which at first concealed them I saw that he too was only half-human. He was a centaur of sorts, although his lower body did not much resemble that of a horse: it was more like that of a sleek brown bear. Like all the rest he stood still and stared at me from a distance, reaching up with an oddly delicate hand to stroke his lank brown beard. Then he spoke or seemed to speak, to the satyr who had sounded the summons. His voice was not in the least

manlike nor did it resemble the whinnying of a horse: again, it was like a series of profound notes sounded by a musical instrument. The faun replied, but I cannot say whether their speech was meaningful.

Again the thought occurred to me that perhaps I had made a mistake and cast my timeshadow into the distant past, before the race of men came into being, and that my mind had seen fit to populate its emptiness according to the imagination of the first story-tellers. Then I wondered whether the images of the past which ancient societies possessed might have been based on misinterpretations of the glimpses of the distant future which their seers had caught. The most gifted among their priest-magicians must always have had the power to journey into the farther reaches of time, but they had never been able to stabilize their timeshadows as I had contrived to do. It was easily understandable that those ancient visionaries had located the Golden Age in the past rather than the future, and made it part of their fantasies of Creation and Descent. This notion raised my spirits. I became convinced once more that I was in an actual future, perhaps the one and only future of destiny. But was there more to this future than gentle and uncommunicative chimeras? Had I any chance of finding out what had happened during the gulf of time which separated this seemingly-happy era from that in which vampires had ruled the world?

Impulsively, I stepped towards the centaur, and reached out my hand as though to clasp his. He did not shy away, but nor did he reach out in friendship. His face showed no detectable expression. *He is an animal*, I thought, despite his human features. *But he does not fear me!* Either he is perfectly



"HE TOO WAS HALF-HUMAN"

tame or he thinks me one of his own kind, a freakish cousin. I stepped back so that I could look at all the assembled crowd. I raised my arms palms open, in a gesture which was intended to signal farewell and reassurance. I felt a slight thrill of triumph as they copied me. With the sole exception of the tiniest child they raised their arms exactly as I had done. Their imitation suggested to me a kind of kinship which ran far deeper than any partial similarity of form.

"At that moment, however, I was reminded once again of the insect which had kept close company with me since my arrival. It now descended to fly around my head, buzzing more loudly than before – and it was no longer alone. Within seconds there were a dozen of the tiny flying things and then hundreds. I flapped my arms reflexively, and although I half-closed my eyes against the imagined assault I saw that the satyrs and the centaur had similarly begun to swat the air. This time their gestures were not mere imitation: the hollow was beset by a coalescing cloud, and the air itself seemed to be abuzz with all-pervading sound. The centaur and his companions turned to run away possessed by a panic which the sight of me had failed to induce. They ran away from the stream, into the depths of the wood, but I ran a different way.

"I and I alone was pursued by the swarm. It was as difficult to run in this world as it had been in the earlier one, and I knew immediately that I could not possibly outrun the tiny things which buzzed around my head, but my fear was unreasoning. I must have blundered on for several hundred yards before I caught my foot upon a trailing root and stumbled. I fell to my knees, still flailing my arms. It seemed that my flailing was not without effect, for there were not so many of the insects about my head now. They were moving ahead of me, as though to anticipate the resumption of my headlong flight, and I cursed their apparent determination to block my way. While I remained where I was, trying hard to catch my breath, I saw that the whole vast swarm was now coming together. The vague cloud began to take on a definite shape, which became ever more distinct.

"As I lowered my arms I saw that the shape which the cloud of insects was assuming was approximately human. While I watched, more astonished than before, it seemed that they ceased to be insects at all, and became the cells of an upright body, an animate bronze statue, its surface as smooth as silk. My terror did not abate, I could not conceive that any being supernaturally distilled from a horde of noxious insects could be anything but loathsome and malevolent. I lost my head completely. When I managed to get to my feet, I hauled myself at the monster striking out violently with my fists, as though to batter it to the ground – but my blows passed clean through it. Its myriad components flew apart as I stuck at it, presenting no resistance.

"I fell again, more heavily this time. The swarm coalesced again into the hideous golem which seemed to be a mocking reflection of my own form. It had my height and my girth, and it did not seem to me that this was mere coincidence. Then, in a travesty of the gesture which the faun had made when I slipped down the bank into the hollow, it stretched out a hand, offering to help me up. I slowly stared at the horrible thing, paralysed by fear. It slowly lowered the proffered arm. Then it opened its brazen mouth and spoke. The syllables were as deep and as hoarse and as hollow as the words which had spilled from my own mouth while I practised the art of pronunciation, but they were quite distinct and there was no mistaking the name that they pronounced.

"'Cop-ple-stone!' said the monster, laboriously. 'Cop-ple-stone!'

## — 8 —

"Had my anxiety been capable of increase, the fact that the monster could pronounce my name might have sent yet another thrill of terror coursing through my attenuated form, but my distress was absolute. But as time passed without my being rent or crushed by those metallic hands, puzzlement gradually took command of my thoughts and drove panic out.

"'How do you know my name?' I demanded. 'Can you read my thoughts?'

"The golem waved its arm in what seemed to be a negative gesture.

"'Copplestone,' it said, speaking with a little more assurance now that it had heard my reply. 'Are you Copplestone?'

"That is my name, I said. How do you know it? The golem took a step towards me, but I did not flinch, by speaking to it I had accepted it as a thinking being. It reached out again, and this time I took its hand. It felt as hard as polished metal, but was not cold. I had the impression that it was very strong. The tiny things which had combined to make it had knitted together perfectly to make a single seamless body.

"Thank you, I said, as I came to my feet. 'What are you?'

"It did not reply. I stood face to face with it now, and I looked into its eyes. They were black orbs of a subtly different texture from the surrounding bronze, infinitely more alien than the eyes of the faun or the eyes of the centaur. Its cheeks were contoured like a man's, although I could not believe that there were similar muscles beneath the outer segment, and it had a nose of sorts. Its mouth was a black slit.

"'Copplestone,' it said, yet again. 'You are Copplestone.'

"'How do you know me?' I countered. I wondered whether something as strange as this automaton made of insects could be a product of my own fevered imagination.

"The golem opened its arms wide, as if to embrace me. 'Come,' it said.

"Where to? I asked – but the golem did not want me to go with it, it merely wanted me to step into its embrace. When I would not do so, it stepped forward to take me. Its countless units came apart again, but it did not break up into a flying swarm. Instead, it flowed around and over me, enclosing me. It formed a new body around my own, fitting itself about me like a suit of living armour – but it had the courtesy, or the common sense, to leave my face uncovered. I could breathe and I could see.

I moved not by my own volition but according to the will of the entity which enclosed me. It began to run, swiftly accelerating its pace to a sprint. Had I tried to achieve such a velocity using the ghostly muscles of my timeshadow it would have required enormous effort, but because the motive force was provided by my captor I felt for the first time that I really was a kind of phantom, lighter than the air. Thus cocooned, I was taken through the forest for many a mile, but we came before very long to a clearing where stood a huge iron mast, a number of low huts and several strange machines with rounded bodies and long tails, each with four long horizontal vanes on top and four much smaller ones arranged vertically at the extremity of the tail.

"I expected to be taken to one of the huts, but I was brought instead to one of these machines. My suit of armour opened a hatch in the belly of one of them, and climbed in. It

was very dark inside. I ended in a sitting position, and my armour flowed away again, to leave me largely uncovered. I was still secured by bands about my arms, legs and waist. My ears were filled with a sound like the droning of a million insects. A sinking sensation in my stomach told me that the machine in whose belly I was now enclosed was lifting from the ground, and I knew that I had simply been transferred from one prison to another, from a running-machine to a flying-machine. The hatchway through which I had entered the machine had closed, and I was in darkness for two or three minutes, but then light returned. It was not diffuse light, like the artificial phosphorescence which had lit the town and the Underworld of my previous vision, it was localized within a space in front of my head. It was as though I were looking into an illuminated aquarium, but there were no fish swimming there. Instead, there was a disembodied head.

The head seemed undiscomfited by its detachment. Its features were animated and not unhandsome, but I knew immediately that it was not a man. I recognized the pallid complexion, the blackish lips and the cat-like eyes. It was an *overman* or the simulacrum of an overman.

"Are you truly Coppystone?" the face said. At any rate, those were the words which came from a speaker somewhere above the image, the dark lips moved to pronounce quite different syllables, and I inferred that some kind of translation machine was again being used.

"I am," I replied hoarsely.

"From what time do you come, Coppystone?" he asked.

"From the 19th century *Anna Dostoevskii*," I told him.

The expression on his face shifted, and he seemed perplexed. There followed a long hesitation. I realized that if he somehow had access to the substance of the conversation I had had with his remote ancestor, so many thousands of years before, he could only know a little about me.

"I am Edward Coppystone," I told him proudly. "I am the pioneer of the exploration of the future. Others will doubtless follow where I have led, but none can come from any earlier time for more than the fleetest moment. Is that why you set your insectile machines to keep watch for my timeshadow? Is that why I am a miracle in your eyes?"

"Tell me the exact day and hour from which you came," said the disembodied head, in a peremptory fashion.

"I was suddenly struck by a fit of suspicion and hesitated before replying. Why do you want to know?" I asked.

"He frowned – an unmistakable gesture of annoyance. "Answer," he said.

"He does not know what I am, I thought. Perhaps my secret was lost. But if so, how? What prevented me from making it known and giving all mankind the power to send timeshadows into the future? Is it possible that this creature desires to know my point of origin in order to take action against me, to prevent my revealing what I know about the fate which awaits mankind? Can these overmen be so worldly wise as to reach backwards through time to annul events which might threaten their victory over mankind?" The head still wanted its answer, but I decided that I must be cautious until I knew more.

"I have questions of my own," I replied, and little time to ask them. You must know a great deal already about my world while I know nothing at all about yours, save that your kind once reduced mine to the level of mere cattle which you milked for blood. Why are you so curious about me, when all the curiosity should be on my side?"

"He looked at me very carefully, as though he could not

make up his mind what to say. He seemed remarkably unintelligent, considering all the marvellous machines which he had at his disposal. Was he, I wondered, no more than a machine himself – another golem, of limited intellectual performance?

"Answer," he said, impotently.

"I am not a fool," I told him. "I refuse to talk to golems and disembodied heads, if they will not tell me what I ardently desire to know. I am your prisoner. Forced to go wherever you care to take me, but I have nothing to say to you unless you will condescend to contribute to my enlightenment." The image flickered, as if rippled by the current of my displeasure. The features of the face shifted eerily.

"Ask," said the head, emotionlessly, "and I will answer."

"I felt a surge of triumph, but restrained my exultation.

"Is yours truly a race of vampires?" I asked. "Did your kind enslave mine, at some point in our mutual history, and reduce the descendants of man to mere animality? Is mankind now extinct?"

"In a time of trial, thousands of years ago," the head reported, "your ancestors fought with mine, and were subdued. Once subdued, they were bred for blood and not for brains, and in the space of a few hundred generations became as docile and as unintelligent as cattle or swine. Overmen no longer need the blood of men but there was no way to return the sentience and intelligence that mankind had lost. My more recent forefathers remade men in the myriad images of ancient human dreams, and gave them a garden in which to live contentedly." This recitation was delivered as though it were a dull lecture of no particular substance. There was no trace of emotion in it, nor of apology.

"I was still sorely puzzled as to the origins of the race which called now themselves *overmen*. If your forefathers were not mine," I said to him, "where did they come from? Were they invaders from Mars?"

"Your kind and mine had common ancestors," he said. He did not elaborate, and I felt slightly frustrated, wondering whether the inadequacy of the answer was deliberate dissimulation.

"Are you, then, the children of the vampires of legend? I asked. "Were your distant ancestors the reanimated corpses of wicked men, returned from the grave to feed upon their brethren?"

"No," he said flatly. "Not that. When do you come from, Coppystone? What moment? What place?"

"Where are we?" I countered. The question was prompted because the flying machine had begun to descend again. Where have you brought me?"

"He did not answer. As the machine settled I felt the bonds which had restrained me flowing away. A ramp extended, so that I might let myself down to the ground. The disembodied head had disappeared, and when I reached out my hand I found that there was nothing there but a blank wall.

"I stepped down from the flying-machine, ready to meet the true masters of this alien future in the flesh."

**To be concluded next month**



**Brian Stableford** is most recent short story for us was "The Unkindness of Ravens" (Issue 90), and his most recent of many novels is *The Criminal of Destruction*. He lives in Reading.

# Vegetable Love, Vaster Than Empires

**STAN NICHOLLS:** I want both of you to identify your most significant childhood experience

**MICHAEL MOORCOCK:** Being raised in south London, the area which after the initial blitz in the East End was the most bombed part of the capital during the war. We got the most V bombs. So I grew up in a constantly malleable landscape. But it wasn't a frightening landscape to children of my age. In fact, it allowed for enormous amounts of freedom because it was rather deserted, there were very few people about.

**TAD WILLIAMS:** It's hard to think of anything truly significant, at least in the living-through-the-blitz sense. I had a pretty normal California suburban childhood. I suppose being read to by my mother and thus connecting with story-telling at an early age – particularly stories of the magical and fantastic – had a more profound effect than any other single thing.

**NICHOLLS:** I know that for a while you attended one of the schools established by the Theosophist Rudolf Steiner. Mike, what impression did that make on you?

**MOORCOCK:** The Steiner school actually shaped my life, and I don't think its influence ever left me. It's a very gentle philosophy. It teaches a form of cosmic consciousness, cosmic Christianity I think they call it, and it has all sorts of notions about the higher planes. So I got quite a lot of my Multiverse ideas from Steiner schooling. I started there when I was seven and eventually got expelled at nine after a career in which I suppose I

perceived myself as being a prisoner of war, constantly trying to tunnel out! I liked their ideas very much, but it was a boarding school and I just didn't want to be away from home. I was always running away. It was a pretty happy childhood, though. There were some things that were awful, of course, but I'm not going to mention those in interviews.

**WILLIAMS:** I have a lot of good memories about the earnestly liberal Northern California public school system that formed much of my worldview. It's fashionable to sneer at liberalism, but what exactly might be wrong with being taught to value creativity, diversity and free-thinking is a bit hard for me to fathom.

**NICHOLLS:** Which writers would you cite as formative influences?



**WILLIAMS:** Mike, for the fluidity of his imagination, among other things; Leiber for his wonderful prose and his sense of humour; Tolkien for the sheer depth of creation; Peake for his feeling for the hilariously macabre, and Bradbury's nifty blend of horror and optimism. Too many other writers to name have had some effect, but those are the principals.

**MOORCOCK:** I would say Fritz Leiber, too, from around 1960 in my case. Poul Anderson was a great influence on me, with *The Broken Sword*. There was some really good stuff around in the 50s and 60s, but quite frankly there's more good stuff now. There's some extraordinarily fine writers and some very good, mature work, much of it American, being published. I quite like the scene these days.

**NICHOLLS:** What differences have you most been aware of between the fantasy/science fiction when you entered it and now?

**WILLIAMS:** Obviously, I have a much shorter overview here than Mike does, although I've been reading the stuff voraciously for about the same length of time he's been writing it. What's changed since I've been a pro is that some of the 1980s trends in publishing have been institutionalized: the hardening walls of commercial genre, the neglect of mid-list writers, the boom-or-bust mentality that leads to sinking most of the money into a few big names. In the writing itself, I think that fantasy is beginning to re-diversify after a period where if it wasn't Tolkeinesque it didn't get printed.

**MOORCOCK:** I've got a simple answer to the question. When I began writing

the Elric and Hawkmoon books in the 60s, I was the first British-born author producing this stuff. Unless you count Tolkien – although I don't believe what I'm writing is in the same tradition as Tolkien. The genre has grown up around me, and I was responsible for pulling some of those strands in. But it was rather difficult for me to come back to fantasy. It was as if all sorts of things that were novel, and had a certain tension and vitality as a result had become such standard techniques, such accepted tropes, that they couldn't work any longer for me. I had to find new ways of re-firing myself.

**NICHOLLS:** Could you try to characterize the stages of your careers?

**MOORCOCK:** I felt I had until the age of 30 to get myself together. I've seen a number of writers produce their best work before 30 then really not do anything as good after. I didn't want to wind up like that! I've always been very analytical about my own processes and self-reliant, essentially, from early childhood. My childhood was one of considerable adult responsibility in certain respects and I maintained that instinct when I started writing, which meant I was very quick to learn by other people's mistakes. I could see where I didn't want to go and could guess how you got there. This ability helped me avoid the route of disappointment, self-deception and unfulfilled hopes that left people washed up in journalistic backwaters by the time they were 40.

The feeling that I had to face my own mortality before 30 comes out in the foreword to *Breakfast in the Ruins* where it says I died of lung cancer at the age of 31. I did that as a way of acknowledging that I had to start looking at the demons that up until then had been driving me, to see where they were coming from. And

that's what I believe saves you. It helps you to continue developing so you don't become a parody of your youthful self, which people want you to do, but really that's not much more than a charade. So I think there are basically two stages to a writer's life: two processes leading to writerly maturity. The first is being chased by the demons. The second is turning and facing those demons, having a good look at the little bastards.

**WILLIAMS:** I feel that for much of my career so far I've been an extremely deferential imitator, although what I was imitating was seldom anything as straightforward as a single writer or style. I believe that with my last few works I'm beginning to find my own true and personal voice. Part of it is that I've been through some very painful stuff in my own life, and now, as approaching middle-age becomes something more than a mere abstraction, I'm also on vastly more intimate terms with my own demons.

Confidence is another factor. I told a friend the other day, "It's interesting being at the stage of my career where getting published or selling books is not the issue, the victories are more likely to be political." That doesn't mean screwing somebody in a deal, or getting a bigger slice of the pie than so-and-so, but rather that the things that matter are being taken seriously, obtaining some kind of respect from my peers, and – most importantly, really – believing that I've come close to putting what's in my head on paper. But you never truly nail it, I think.

**NICHOLLS:** Mike, you recently announced your intention to leave London and relocate in America. How do you feel about that?

**MOORCOCK:** Well, they've got Niagara Falls, the Grand Canyon, the Painted

Desert, all sorts of wonders are readily available. And by land – I hate flying – I like the atmosphere of America and the optimism of Americans. I like their willingness to take risks and look at new ideas. It's the sort of culture I enjoy being in. Those parts of America I like best, and I mean nothing against the other parts in saying this, are the West and South, which have histories and landscapes I find very inspiring. I feel good about the move.

**NICHOLLS:** Tad, in 1992 you moved the other way, from California to London. What impact has this had on your life and work?

**WILLIAMS:** Moving to London hasn't affected me as much as the real emotional stuff of which it's a large and visible symptom, namely big changes in my life. Of course, getting a good feeling for another culture, even one so familiar to my own as Britain, never hurts a writer. And England has been an iconic place for me ever since my mother first read me things like *The Wind in the Willows*. A friend said to me some time ago, "Now you'll never feel truly at home in either place." I don't know if that's true, but it's an interesting thought for someone who examines the idea of 'home' in as much of his work as I do.

**NICHOLLS:** How do you think your work will be affected by living in the States, Mike?

**MOORCOCK:** I'm not too sure. I've set quite a few of my stories in America, and the Pyatt books, for instance, have lots of American characters. The novel I'm currently working on is set in versions of Louisiana, Mississippi, a little bit of California and mostly in Texas. So I'm moving to somewhere that's already part of my imaginative landscape. Just as an American would

# Michael Moorcock and Tad Williams in conversation with Stan Nicholls

cheerfully move to London as part of his or her imaginary landscape. There are places that are to you, for whatever reason: romantic places, or places where you feel comfortable and I feel I'll be comfortable in Austin.

There are problems with moving to America. Problems of parochialism. Just today I had a very nice lunch with two friends who are both well known London writers. They're extraordinarily good company, partly because we all have the same vast wealth of cultural sub-references and I think I might miss that. I'm used to being pretty much at the hub of my culture, which is where I want to be and I don't feel that's possible in America for somebody who writes mainly fantasy. Which is probably a sad commentary on America. It's quite tough here too, of course. But it's not so difficult because there are lots of us moving quite freely and happily between outright fantasy and sf and, broadly speaking, social fiction, without apology. There still seems to be a fair amount of apology in America. But I really don't know how my work will change. You'll have to read me in a few years and decide for yourself.

**NICHOLLS:** Hemingway said an author writes most accurately about a place after leaving it. Do either of you agree with that?

**WILLIAMS:** Like a lot of things Hemingway said, it's wonderfully epigrammatic but highly debatable. Are you telling me that Hardy or Eliot or Dickens could have written more usefully or tellingly about England if they had moved to Rangoon or Teaneck, New Jersey? Who can say? Some writers may need distance, or the perspective of contrast. I see America in a different way since I've lived in England, but whether I see it more accurately is almost impossible to say.

**MOORCOCK:** I don't know about accurately, because what does accurately mean? I don't think I write very accurately about places I just happen to have a knack of visiting extremely romantic locations which are easily written about, perhaps. It doesn't take much to write lyrically

about a place like Marrakesh. Even in the simplest language that already begins to have a feel to it. I think it's more a question of being taken by the moment. I mean, I've sat writing about mountain climbing on top of mountains.

I've travelled an awful lot and I suppose I've considered this question. I think the more you begin to travel, the more you begin to realize that people everywhere have characteristics in common, and you can get involved in the same conversation with any culture I've visited, and hear the same kind of arguments and petty

They're so miraculously wonderful you just can't. They are beyond any kind of language so there is a certain point at which you don't even try.

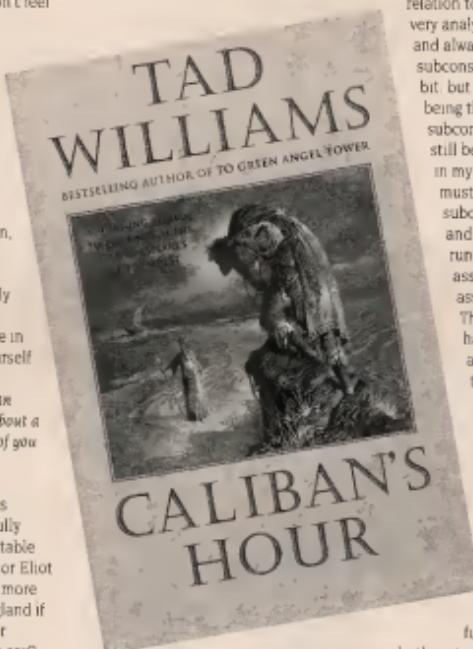
**NICHOLLS:** Some writers appear to be very mechanistic in their creation of material, others rely more on their subconscious. Where do you see yourselves on this context?

**MOORCOCK:** It's all very close for me because I do a bit of both. I wrote a critical series called 'Aspects of Fantasy' in the early 1960s, and talked about Freudian and Jungian theories in relation to creativity. I've been very, very analytical from the beginning and always had a strong sense of my subconscious being the important bit, but I also saw structure as being the way to allow the subconscious its fullest flight. I still believe that I put great trust in my subconscious, but I think it must be structured as well. The subconscious is associational, and what it will do if allowed to run on and on is keep associating, and the associations will proliferate. There's a point where you have to rein it in and use it in a certain way. You have to take control of it. Then you can analyse and make something of the science of the structure of a novel, and with that science you can start doing what I feel I began to do increasingly well in the Cornelius books, which is to take enormous liberties with narrative while not losing sight of its

function. In the end, writing's both instinct and structure. It's skill, experience and knowing how far you can run risks and still make it work.

**WILLIAMS:** For me, I think you become as familiar as you can with simple story-telling – and that's a huge subject to try to master a lifetime's work and more – then you allow your associational, or subconscious side, to put the organs and flesh over the bones of story.

In my *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn* books, I discovered that if I trusted my subconscious or imagination, whatever you want to call it, and if I



complaints about people. The attribution of national characteristics: whether virtues or vices amount to stereotypes, but those stereotypes exist because they are heavily rooted in reality.

I don't have a very good memory, actually, so if I leave it for too long I forget about it. I have to go out and buy a book and bone up on the subject. My tendency is to make of some aspects of reality something else. My eye will make it do that: I see things that aren't there, as it were. But some places you cannot romanticize

made the characters as real and honest as I could then no matter how complex the pattern being woven, my subconscious would find ways to tie it together – often doing things far more complicated and sophisticated than I could with brute conscious effort. I would have ideas for ‘nodes,’ as I think of them – story or character details that have lots of potential connections to other such nodes – and even though I didn’t quite understand, I would plunk them in. Two hundred pages later, everything would back-fit, and I’d say, ‘Ah that’s why I wrote that’.

**NICHOLLS:** Have either of you ever drawn inspiration from your dreams or nightmares?

**MOORCOCK:** I don’t know that I dream very much. Actually, I’ve had one or two extraordinarily lovely dreams, some great affirmative dreams of going to heaven! I very rarely have nightmares. I do have waking visions a lot of the time. For example, when I was writing two novels at once – *City of the Autumn Stars* at night and *Laughter of Carthage* during the day, both in the first person – I got so tired that I started to write my own dreams. I was no longer writing the narrative of the story but the narrative of my dreams. That was very weird. Visions I have had – although not recently I used to see clouds of angels and Victorian Madonnas and stuff. And I hadn’t been in a church more than once or twice in my life when that happened.

**WILLIAMS:** Dream images have occasionally wound up as short stories, but like Mike I don’t know much about my dreams. I tend to remember only those I have during naps, or shallow sleep on bad nights. I sometimes wish I remembered more but I worry that then my imagination, satisfied at finally being noticed, would go off the boil.

**NICHOLLS:** What observations do you have on the function of short stories as opposed to the novel form?

**MOORCOCK:** I’m a natural novelist just as some people go for symphonic works and other people go for quartets. I tend towards the symphonic with the full orchestra. It’s trying to use all the instruments, all the

techniques available to tell as many layers of story as possible. If you’re attempting to write on several levels at once, however crudely, you need a bit of space to do that. Your aspirations have a lot to do with the novelists you’ve admired – Conrad, Dickens, George Meredith and H. G. Wells in my case – and you try to apply those standards to a science-fiction story. There’s only good in that because it raises aspirations. The more ambition a writer has, the better.

Most of the short stories I’ve done fit into the overall framework of what I’m writing, so there’s always a knitting element in my work, whether it’s the Cornelius stories or the stories of the Rose I’m writing now. There’s a deliberate weaving in of extra threads. Although I try to make everything I write readable without reference to anything else I write. Your trilogies make my trilogies seem positive saplings. Tad, Do you write many short stories?

## used to see clouds of angels and Victorian Madonnas

**WILLIAMS:** Because I’m always behind deadline – it’s chronic with me, like an allergy – I usually feel too guilty to write short stories when I’m working on a novel. I try to cram my short story writing – and screenplay writing, and other stuff – into the times between novels. So I’ve written less than a dozen in my whole professional career. That said, I think I differ from Mike in that my short fiction tends to be quite different than my novels. I tend to make stories out of ideas, some of them quite small and snappy, like Roald Dahl’s short work. Novels tend to spring from broader themes, and then grow like Marvell’s vegetable love: vaster than empires, etcetera, etcetera.

**NICHOLLS:** Can we talk about the interest you share in chaos theory?

**MOORCOCK:** When I first encountered chaos theory I felt as if I’d been presented with maps of my own mind. I read all the texts and became very, very absorbed in the subject. It fit with my own work and gave a logic system to stuff that I’d been running on instinct before. I’d been travelling on these invisible routes and suddenly there was this whole delightful notion of chaos theory. When I was putting together the omnibus volumes [a 14-book uniform set of his major works, published by Millennium], I was able to use chaos theory and some of the ideas of chaos mathematics as logic systems for giving the books a further shape, a more coherent shape. I like adding dimensions, and in a way it’s as though I’ve always applied chaos theory to fiction-making processes. By adding, you amplify the whole and end up with a non-linear, multi-faceted narrative. It’s possible to argue that the thing gets bigger than you.

**WILLIAMS:** Chaos theory alone is very interesting – what I grasp of it – but it’s the overall ideas about complex systems that fascinate me. I’ve always looked for models for understanding, and the more I learn about things like evolution, the more systems around me make sense. When I’m trying to figure out why people behave the way they do, and I consider the multiplicity of shaping forces, strong and weak, and the complexity of effect those have, it makes it easier for me to understand – or think I understand – why things happen. I’m also interested in the slightly more scientific side of it as well, especially artificial life and the ecological development of intelligence, and I’ll be flailing these concepts around in my layperson-like way in the next set of novels.

**NICHOLLS:** I wonder if we could turn to the subject of cult writers. Philip K. Dick, for example, is an enormously influential figure yet the literary establishment brands him cult. It seems that the US in particular embraces sf and fantasy as a vigorous part of mainstream culture in a way the UK doesn’t.

**MOORCOCK:** I don’t agree with the question. My experience is that Britain does rather more incorporate these things into its mainstream culture than America. Since the mid-60s in America I’ve noticed the divisions between

different groups. It's partly because of geographical reasons, partly historical reasons, but the divisions seem to be significant. I've just written a grumpy note to the Authors' Guild in the States on this very subject: They're doing a survey of what their members produce what kind of fiction and non-fiction, and they sent a questionnaire with categories for you to tick. They've got mysteries, westerns, romance, thrillers, suspense – all kinds of categories and sub-categories – and there is no category whatsoever for fantasy, science fiction or any related imaginative work. I wrote back to them saying this seemed to be typical, that for some reason one of the most popular forms of fiction of the late 20th century remains invisible. It's a very funny thing. It's as if it's too big a field to take in.

I think the problem most people have is the problem I have – I actually don't like much science fiction and fantasy. I never did. Most of the stuff I read never quite came up to expectation, never seemed as good as it should have been. A lot of people read Philip K. Dick and think, 'Wow, if this is science fiction I want more of it!' Then they don't find anything quite like it. What they tend to find are the amateurish, minor cyberpunk efforts. I don't mean the best of those writers, for whom I have considerable admiration, but the kind of stuff that simply takes a kind of *now* feel and essentially rewrites *Blade Runner*. Most people don't see Ballard, Dick or Bradbury as genre writers in the way they see Clarke, Heinlein and Asimov. And to some extent that's fair. Because those writers that I've mentioned are not genre writers in the same way. They have not established the same kind of genre presence, and frequently they're not so popular with the fans. I have friends who read Dick and Ballard and a few others and that's what they like: they really aren't interested in the broad body of science fiction.

**WILLIAMS:** I think I'm with Mike on this one. I've always read science fiction and fantasy, but decreasingly so into adulthood until I got into the field and then felt obliged to keep up with what peers and friends were doing. I don't like most of what's available, since it's now a big-time commercial genre and must therefore chum out a vast amount of that –

horrible word – product.

I think most people feel about science fiction and fantasy the way I feel about say, mysteries. There are some people who I think are brilliant, and read faithfully – Ruth Rendell and some others – but I read only a tiny fraction of the stuff written in the field because I wouldn't read a mystery just because it's a mystery. I read the writers I like and hope people turn me on to good ones I don't know. I also don't believe that 'cult' writers are treated any better in the States than the UK. Possibly, since there's a larger overall market in America, it's easier for a niche writer to support himself or herself there.

### ■ actually don't like much science fiction and fantasy

**MOORCOCK:** I've been branded as a cult. But some so-called cult writers actually have larger sales than the non-cult writers. This is a very peculiar discrepancy. You can look at the bestseller lists and see that in certain weeks maybe five of the top ten books are fantasy or science fiction novels of some description. Yet the literary editors, while prepared to devote space to romance, historicals and mystery, have a stronger than ever bias against fantasy and science fiction. In the 60s and 70s, the bias simply wasn't as strong. Literary snobbery has taken over almost completely now. I know the frustration of the writer working in a non-respectable genre. I would imagine it's not too different to some of the film makers of the earlier part of the century, people like Griffith and even John Ford, who knew they produced work as good as anyone else in any other field but were marginalized. It's hard to say what marginalization is because you're not marginalized by the public, I don't feel that I'm marginalized by the public at all. I feel my public is a perfectly normal segment of the population. I mean, if the media want to

marginalize science fiction, they take a Star Trek fan wearing a propeller beanie with a water pistol going zap and represent that as science fiction. We all know that sf fan exists, and we all wish that he didn't. We know he represents the loony fringe, but the public gets a very different view.

**WILLIAMS:** I've gone up and down for years over the issue of 'critical acclaim'. Like any serious writer, I want to be judged on the merits of my work, not on the prejudices of a particular critic. Self-evidently most of the literary establishment finds itself in an awkward position when forced to review a book that is obviously science fiction or fantasy. It amuses me how far out of the way they will go to suggest that Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* or something like that isn't science fiction, since that would make it, by definition, trash.

**MOORCOCK:** There are individual writers who produce certain things that can be called science fiction and fantasy, but frequently they're no more generic than mainstream writers. I mean, Ballard is no more generic than Martin Amis, for instance. But certainly the likes of Amis and other modern social novelists can be seen as people writing in an increasingly decadent genre. People are constantly complaining these days that the English novel, by which they mean a very narrow band of English novel – actually the English social novel – is pretty much on its last legs. They aren't the novels people read very much and they aren't the novels that are very representative of the culture. Or they're representative of a small, dying part of the middle class.

**WILLIAMS:** The farther along I get – and it's been particularly evident living in a town as culturally close-knit as London is in some ways – the more disenchanted with 'critical establishments' I become, whatever the art form in question. Up close, you see the politicking, the nepotism, the pettiness and the blinkered inability to make judgements about things the individuals in question haven't been taught about. So I've begun to ask, 'Who cares whether the literary establishment gets it? Who the hell are they anyway?'

I worked in a college radio station

for years College radio in the States is very trendy and as soon as a beloved cult band got famous – or even just signed with a major label – they were crap. That's the kind of jealous secret-handshake only-we-know nonsense that leads to the worst masturbatory excesses of art criticism. As soon as you start playing to dear gallery, you're already lost. I was told about a noted critic who said: 'A novel that makes you want to turn the page isn't worth reading,' and I burst into amazed laughter. How far removed from the reality of fiction can you get? No wonder things like Hollywood movies have become, unfortunately, the true repositories of international culture and contemporary imagination.

**NICHOLLS:** So let's talk about movies. You turned down the chance to write the script for Peter Ackroyd's novel *Hawksmoor*. Mike, and saw your script for *The Land That Time Forgot* ruined in the execution. Would you ever work in films again?

**MOORCOCK:** I turned down the opportunity to talk to people about doing the script for *Hawksmoor* is rather truer. I've become very used to controlling things myself and I don't like working in the film business. It looked as though I was going to work on a project with Richard Dreyfuss who had a specific idea for a movie and told me what he wanted. I thought it was in some ways a rather dumb idea – Philip Marlowe in the land of *Nomads of Time* – but I did my best to produce a good Marlowe pastiche that would work in the sort of circumstances he wanted. I tried to decide what Chandler's virtues were and reproduce them. It was an exercise rather than anything I could get really enthusiastic about. And then the minute you've done that they decide it's not what they wanted after all. The amount of sheer wasted time is so appalling. And it isn't economical for me. I can make more money writing a novel than I can writing a film script. Because that novel is going to keep on making money for me in a way a film script never does.

The reason I wrote *The Land That Time Forgot* with Jim Cawthorn was that Edgar Rice Burroughs Incorporated insisted on me being the writer. It was as simple as that. They wanted Burroughs to be well

represented and the idea properly put across, and that's exactly what Cawthorn and I did. It's the only Burroughs story that has, as it were, a subtext, and it was an interesting idea. We turned the cruel German into a sensitive geologist, or whatever we made him, so that he could speak for the environment and turn it into a little moral tale, which is what I think Burroughs had intended as well. The fly in the ointment was John Dark, who's an appalling producer.

I don't have much in the way of immediate relationships with the film world. I get letters from friends who are in Hollywood and they're so bloody miserable it always reminds me I'm glad I'm not going through it again. To me, it's mostly nightmare. But it's a banal nightmare. It's very, very boring. The only way in the past that I've been able to take Hollywood was by being drugged all the time, and I don't much fancy doing that in the future. The quality of the drugs isn't as good for a start.

## **E**lric is the perfect teenage rock-and-roll hero

**WILLIAMS:** I'm amazed there's never been an Elric movie, Mike. Not only are the books wonderful, full of cool stuff, brilliant images and interesting moral dilemmas, but Elric is the perfect teenage rock-and-roll hero – he's skinny, pale, depressed, unlucky in love, but when called upon he can kick major butt.

**MOORCOCK:** As I say I don't really have any ambitions *re* film, except that I'm interested in *animé* and I think they could do a really good *animé* film of Elric. In fact I've done a scenario for an Elric *animé*. Well see how that comes off. I think there's a way forward in *animé*. I like the way the Japanese are going, the best of them. So I've got somewhere in the back of my mind the idea that I'd like to do *animé* with some of the fantasy stuff.

**WILLIAMS:** Realizing that most of my novels – due to length alone – will probably never be filmable. I'm writing some screenplays. I love the form. I grew up on visual arts, and when film or television is good, it's as good as anything. So I'd love to work in the medium, and intend to. That said, I'm old enough now that I don't care whether I ever get the good table at Hollywood restaurants or am seen with major deal-makers. I effectively gave up drugs years ago, and I'm happily settled down in my private life, so there isn't much temptation to want anything besides the pleasures of creating.

**NICHOLLS:** What are your current ambitions?

**MOORCOCK:** I think I'm very pleased to have written a new science fantasy novel, as I'm calling it. I've always had a preference for these kinds of stories. It's an ambition to make literary use of these sorts of stories and by doing that to recognize their virtues and not simply parody them, which I think most people are inclined to do. That's where they go seriously wrong. The ambition was to write a science-fiction novel, and I've done that and I think made use of literary historical stuff without blowing the whistle.

Another, current, ambition is to finish the Pyatt set. I've got one more to do, which I'm working on. It's very hard because it's set in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Italy and so on. It's very, very difficult to keep working on something like that, so I'm taking the odd break every 25,000 words or so to produce a short story or something.

I think ambition always has to have a power ingredient. One is to some extent seeking power. Not necessarily over other human beings, but possibly over one's own fate. I am one of those people who actually didn't begin with a particularly large ambition. When I was 17, my big ambition was to have a lurid paperback published under my own name, selling with the other lurid paperbacks. That's really all I wanted at the time. My ambitions increased as my technical skill increased. The thing about writers is they have their own inner strengths and the work is its own satisfaction. I said this recently to a friend of mine who was in the doldrums, a writer who's extremely

famous in his own field. 'No,' he said. 'I never felt like that. I just wanted to be rich and famous.' I was quite surprised! It never occurred to me that people went into this business to get rich and famous. You get famous by accident. You just happen to be doing something you like and it catches on with people. It's nice to get rich and famous but I'm sure it wasn't a primary objective for me. To be paid for doing something you like is about the limit of your imagination. The danger is that because you start to get famous, and because other people like your stuff, you can convince yourself you're somehow suited to talk on any subject. There's a tendency for writers to get self-impressed.

**WILLIAMS:** I'm just starting another brutally long multi-book thingie — that's really the only length it can be. I swear, I hate long books — called *Otherland*. It's set in a near-future in which the main characters are forced to go through commercially available virtual-reality environments to the places that lie beyond — the invented freedoms of various rich and powerful

people who have the money and information technology to make worlds for themselves. Beyond that, as the protagonists will discover, is the wave-front of reality itself, where a whole new universe is coming into being. But since a lot of the worlds the characters pass through are invented by humans, and can be re-creations of historical periods, or wild wish-fulfilments, the story will be in some way more fantasy than science fiction. I also have *Caliban's Hour* out this Fall, a short novel based on *The Tempest*, and what happens before and after it told from Caliban's point of view.

**NICHOLLS:** What thoughts occur if you contemplate stopping writing?

**WILLIAMS:** I can conceive of a life without writing books, but I can't conceive of a life in which I wasn't creating something. I'd have to be directing movies or painting frescoes or writing musical comedies. Something.

**MOORCOCK:** Part of you sometimes says, 'I don't want to go on doing this

for the rest of my life, maybe I should take up an interesting hobby.' But I don't really think I'd like to stop. It remains, however, a terrifying task. Just shit scary. But it's extraordinarily fulfilling. I can't think of anything I'd rather do or anything that gives me so much freedom. For which I'm very grateful.

**NICHOLLS:** If you could write your own obituary, how would it read? Or what would the first line be?

**WILLIAMS:** I'm going to pinch actor David Thewlis' line. When asked how he wanted to die, he said 'Unsuccessfully'.

**MOORCOCK:** It would have to be something funny. I like Spike Milligan's 'I told you I was sick.'

**Note:** Since the above interview was conducted Michael Moorcock has moved to Texas, and Ted Williams has been dividing his time between Britain and the USA.

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# YULETIDE KARAOKE



**P**ip Marlow is not dead. My dear chap you must believe me! There is no doubt whatever about that. This isn't some unattributable comment! You have my on-the-record word!"

It was rare for anyone to question the word of E. Ben Aesir. None of the journalists and presenterettes tried it. Even his nephew didn't want to in the presence of the Three Ghosts as he thought of them. But junior had jostled the December crowds on the tube to be in the studio of Aesir's tower in person when he could have watched the telepress conference at his mediadisco club in Denmark Street. He wanted to know what was going on.

Things wound up: the few hacks who were there in person left junior sauntered to the podium trying to look like a close family member, there to give a seasonal greeting and discuss private arrangements. Of course, that's what he was, but none of the Creative Executives moved. Still, he was a business man as much as a CDJ, so he'd be able to handle them.

"Happy Crappin' Unk, I mean like Yuletide Success!"

E. Ben Aesir beamed on hearing the Millennial seasonal greeting he was promoting from his often forgetful nephew. The latter felt encouraged to go on: "I mean, like, how's business?"

"Excellent! Wonderful! We call it the Millennium Bonus! Our figures on Yuletide videos and seasonal spin-offs are breaking records!" Aesir grasped his nephew's hand and shook it firmly. At the same time he gave the young man a hard slap on the shoulder of his low-fashion baggy-pinstripes treating him more like a junior business colleague than a relative.

"And the Millennium Xmas-aganza? Everyone says you're exorcizing those gremlins pretty well!"

E. Ben Aesir continued to beam enthusiasm. "Jesus Two Thousand is on the road! We've fixed the timing. GMT wasn't on, so it's midnight, Bethlehem time. Which was my original conception, but Project Development wanted the Euro-West market to feel they were taking part in Midnight Mass, at midnight. But the churches were dragging their feet, claiming not to be able to install the equipment, would you believe it, even with our SuperTerms offer? Which is a shame, but now we have a big target audience and admarket in Euro-East. I'm quite sure the original idea was best, purest!"

"S'pose it means the Aussies'll have to get up a bit early!"

Aesir beamed. "Serve 'em right for watching the satellite we don't talk about and having such unyuletide weather! Up at dawn for them! But it's exactly what we need for the US market! Of course each timezone will have its

own broadcast at its own midnight, and this way we can sweep up *érotic* audiences, the ones who like live Midnight Mass and those who can't get to it!"

One of the three ghostwriters, the one junior thought of as "Past" came in smoothly. "This way the whole world can take part in a Midnight Mass Christmas Carol party at the exact moment of Jesus's Two Thousandth Birthday!" She was a platinum blonde who had the sort of oversmooth good looks which shouted "facelift!" She wore a white, gold-belted, sleeveless mini-skirt which looked out of place and decade on an exec. But then everyone knew she did vital work on AesirCo's best-selling "Bodiced Raider" historical novels, aimed at the liberated romantic and published under Aesir's own name.

Junior felt uneasy. No one, even in the family, knew quite how important the ghosts were: whether they were mouth-pieces and processors-for-hire, or influenced his uncle's policy as much as was hinted on pirate-broadcast gossip shows. Insiders knew that little put out under E. Ben Aesir's name was all his work. There was only the semi-autobiographical multi-media "Cellar Band to Satellite". That was all Aesir. His uncle now looked as well-fed and permanently youthful as the waxwork of a 1950s Country star, if his suit was more conventional. Junior wondered if anyone else could remember the lean-mean and fame-hungry rebel who had toured as DJ SKRU-1 with his partners MC MARL-O and Dancing Dolly, not that Dolly Kratch got much space in the autobiography. Word was, Aesir hadn't let anyone work on that!

He always thought of Pip Marlow as his godfather. His uncle's long-term partner had taught him how to get on in the business this family dominated... indeed, it was Pip who had suggested he adopt the name SKRU-Junior."

He thought about how Pip would deal with it, and asked "So, what's the problem with old Marlow? What led those clowns to think he was dead?"

"Oh, he's not dead!" Aesir repeated. "Scum! Just because someone who's worked all his life happens to be indisposed."

He looked less confident than usual. Before he could go on, the second ghost-writer, the one junior thought of as "Present" said: "He's having the best case-management. State-of-the-Tech Precryogenic stasis!"

"Hold on!" junior felt able to interrupt this girl, as she seemed closer to his own age, absurdly young to be the person who did the key work on all the soaps which went out under E. Ben Aesir's name. She was tall and buxom, and wore a Millennium Party dress from Yves

Milan. It was green, full-length, very low-cut, and looked so loose that her

*Peter T. Garratt*

breasts might fall out of it at any second (He knew it was an original because despite her calculatedly exaggerated gestures, this did not happen. None of the imitations available from chainstores and carpark markets avoided the falling-out they threatened or promised. That did not stop a lot of girls wearing the imitations to his club.) Her crystalshells were so clear that her feet appeared bare, and she had a wreath of green tinsel holly on her head.

He went on. 'I mean, isn't cryogenics? I know they mean to thaw the people out eventually, but I mean, well, they're sort of fairly dead when they go into the freezer aren't.'

'No, no!' Present interrupted. 'Luckily, Mr Marlow was able to take advantage of the very latest Pre-Cryogenic suspension. He was worried to find he was in a very early stage of Vron's Disease, a little-known neurological condition. Research on a cure is still in the formulation stage, so naturally Mr Marlow preferred to wait it out undergoing a new deep-sleep therapy. In fact deeper than sleep. His condition won't change or get worse at all, and if absolutely necessary he can be woken up for a short period from time to time.'

'That's right.' The third ghost whom Junior thought of as 'Future' for his work on Aesir's graphic serials and anime blockbusters backed her up. He was tall and wore only black a hooded jumpsuit, and despite the season and indoor location, very large opaque wraparound shades. 'He's left an interactive personal program so we can consult him about the ideal medical opportunity to wake him. Or, if his opinions are needed about an emergency, whether it's OK to wake him for that.'

'Why not have a look?' E Ben Aesir took charge. 'You're family and dear old Marlow was almost family. The business is an extended family after all.'

What is he here? Not in a clinic or something?

'He has his own suite in the staff medical centre,' Past said. 'Where could the care be better?'



Aesir led the way to the lifts. Junior resented the ghosts closing round them like an escort. This was starting to feel like a very extended family!

The lift went up. Past commented. 'Mr Aesir has arranged for medical to be on the level below his own office. That high up there isn't much pollution from fumes. The patients can have the windows open for unconditioned air in good weather.'

Aesir added cheerfully. 'But the only one in at the moment is old Pip, and he's not complaining about air quality!'

Marlow's office was now an extension to the medical centre. Junior recognized Marlow's personal Strossix workstation with its huge screen. Pip Marlow himself lay on a bed with raised sides, each of which was covered in digital displays and at-a-glance medical progress charts. Drip tubes ran under the sheet. There was a glass lid over the arrangement which made it look like an updated sarcophagus. Marlow looked pale but not wan, and Junior could see that he was breathing very slowly. E Ben Aesir said, 'If it's a while till anyone comes up with a cure, well, old Pip's so slowed down here he could outlive us all!'

Perhaps you'd like to see the interactive? Future said. He switched on the workstation and clattered rapidly on the keyboard. It's quite remarkable, Mr Marlow's own work. In fact his main project since he finished setting up the integrated computer system AesirCo now has... Unless someone's being

very secretive, it's the most advanced interactive program in the world. Voice activated and it seems to be able to interact with more than one user. There's tremendous potential here for AesirCo to enter the New Millennium ahead of the market!'

Marlow, junior knew, had concentrated on the technical while Aesir studied the market and made sure the company both adapted to it and led it. He had noticed, but had been too young and unconfident to comment on, E Ben Aesir's gradual change from relentless rebel to committed conformist. Marlow had changed less, if anything getting more preoccupied with the technical side, perhaps anticipating that health and mortality might beget him his full enjoyment of AesirCo's success.

A menu appeared, then gave way to an image of a door with a brass knocker. Future typed 'KNOCK' there was a sound-effect knocking, then a voice which made junior jump. It was exactly Marlow's voice: it only said 'Come in!' but even so...

The door opened and the viewpoint moved in. It was the best high-def graphic junior had seen. Marlow was shown reclining on a couch in an airy room overlooking a sunlit sea in blue suit and socks, no shoes. He was reading digital displays which appeared on the socks, though at the moment they only showed the time. In one corner was a potted tree in whose branches a figure like a mediaeval knight had become entangled. A young woman clad only in long hair seemed to be trying half-heartedly to help, though a dent in Marlow's couch slowly righting itself, implied she had been sitting with him until the knock.

Future said 'Voice activate' and Virtual-Marlow looked round as if at him. The image was younger and leaner than the suspended body, than Marlow's recent, relatively businesslike self. Future went on 'Activating interrogation programme. Pip Marlow Interactive. Good afternoon, Mr Marlow.'

The image said 'Happy Christmas! Or should it be Yuletide Success?'

Yuletide Success. Mr Marlow. We are formally asking if you are ready to take advantage of the present medical situation.'

The image of Marlow shrugged. Future went on 'Professor Vron has a treatment ready to begin double-blind trials.'

To begin? Marlow's voice was sharp, sceptical, not at all programmed. So I might get the placebo? Smarties? No thanks.'

Aesir said 'You wouldn't have to enter the trial - OK. So is there any evidence about the new drug?'

Future said stiffly 'I think you know Professor Vron wouldn't raise your hopes with anecdotal evidence only.'

'So there's no way I'm ready to start this treatment, is there?'

Future said sidelong 'The program doesn't only respond to questions about treatment.' He faced the screen. 'Look Mr Marlow, this isn't that urgent, but it's Aesir Communications' biggest ever event, something you might want to wake up for anyway.' He started to describe Jesus Two Thousand.

The image appeared almost to sneer. 'So it's a Millennium and you've gone overboard on the Global Karaoke Christmas Carol Broadcast? I don't think so. It's no emergency!'

Junior turned excitedly to his uncle and said 'Hey, it's... incredible! Can anyone... can I... talk to him... it?'

'Sure can. Why don't you try?' Junior said. 'Like, did you dream up this whole system?'

Marlow seemed to turn to look at him. Junior realized uneasily that there was a vidcam above the screen. Even more disconcertingly, the image seemed to wink. "Hi, Junior!"

"All Pip's old mannerisms!" E. Ben Aesir chortled.

"Marlow" said. "I integrated the Company system. Later, I slipped a little offshoot of myself through the net."

"I see." Junior stared at the image, then blurted. "Are you aware of yourself in there?"

"Interesting question. I've been wondering about that myself. I guess I'd better say that's for me to wonder and you to wonder. Though then I could say, I wonder, therefore I am!"

"Same old Pip!" Aesir chuckled.

Present added. "Of course, Mr Marlow was ahead of the game on interactives. This is beyond State-of-the-Tech."

The Marlow image said. "So, Junior, you'll play your part in the Global Carol Karaoke? Good family member?"

"I think so. We've got to finalize details—"

"Course he is!" Aesir broke in. "It's just detail!"

Junior scratched his head. "Well, I do want to... but like I said, it's not going to be easy to get away from the club Christmas Eve is one of our biggest nites of the Season."

Past came in. "Live broadcasts from Club Munch em are always good for the ratings, especially this Season." She glanced coldly at Present. She was hinting that during a live broadcast from Club Munch em, some of the girls who wore cheap imitations of Present's high-fashion style would have problems with cleavage control. Each such incident added to the ratings for the next show. It was ideal for E. Ben Aesir: he could put live breasts on TV without anyone saying he had planned the incident. The question was: would he do it on Christmas Eve?

Present sniffed and shrugged. It was a very exaggerated shrug, but everything stayed expensively put. She said. "I am worried that what's supposed to be an event for everyone doesn't have enough appeal for younger customers who aren't so involved in churchgoing activity."

"That's exactly it!" Aesir exclaimed. "Get everyone involved. Exactly what I always wanted! But, and he looked sharply at Junior, 'I don't think actual dancing.'

Junior shook his head. "Oh no, just the carols. We want to sing 'Mary's Boy Child,' and there's a great bunch who come in, nurses mainly, who do 'The Twelve Days of Christmas.'

"So I can rely on you to keep things under control?" Aesir's eyes were hard but, as Junior nodded, he beamed. "So that's it then? Almost in the can?"

"Not quite!" The interruption from Marlow's image made them all jump, though only Junior didn't stiffen at once. "How about old Bob Kratch? You inviting him? Or is it still 'It'?"

"That's quite another matter!" Aesir snapped. "Bob's not been in touch for ages! When I do hear from him, it's all about some time-wasting doos house where he pretends to work. He actually wanted us to broadcast from there! I ask you! Since I told him it was out of the question, no contact, just sulks!"

Junior said tentatively. "I know old Bob's, like, a bit of a drop-out, but his heart's in the right place."

"And another thing!" E. Ben Aesir interrupted. "Bob was very unhelpful about the whole concept of Jesus Two Thousand and the Millennium celebrations generally. He seems to think for some perverted reason of his own that New Year 2000 isn't the real Millennium, and Christmas Day isn't really Jesus's birthday! Here am I, working to put on the biggest

Yuletide event ever and my supposed son's talking trash like that!"

Junior didn't answer. He happened to know that Aesir had first taken an interest in things Millennial after seeing a horror video based on the prophecies of Nostradamus, but unlike Bob Kratch, he knew better than to air such memories in public. Instead, he said. "I mean, it's a bit of a tip where Bob works, but it is, like, a charity."

"Humbug! Not a registered charity!" E. Ben Aesir said firmly. "De-registered for dabbling in politics. God knows where people's donations wind up! There's no way I'm going to jeopardize Jesus Two Thousand by getting involved with a de-registered charity."

"Yeah," said Junior flatly. "OK. But he will be there for Christmas dinner, won't he? It doesn't seem right without him."

Aesir hesitated. The image of Marlow seemed to cock its head and look right at him. In the end he said. "Well look, OK. I never said he couldn't come. It's up to him. If he wants an invite, he'll have to get in touch and sort it out. He'll have to be on time and look respectable. Are you seeing him?"

"I sort of thought I might drop by."

"Well, if you do see him, you can tell him from me that if he does get in touch we'll sort everything out."

Junior nodded. As he turned to go, Aesir said gruffly. "Look, Bob said if I didn't make a donation to his damn humbug charity, he didn't want a Christmas present. I said I pay tax to support the non-workers, which is true, but if I give him a cash present, he can do what he damn well likes with it! Card!"

Future bussed himself at the workstation keyboard. Marlow's image abruptly vanished, the printer whined, and a card came out. It was identical to the one Junior had received by post, a scene photographed at the last Aesir seasonal gathering. The centre-piece was the playpen with the twin boys already a little big for it. E. Ben Aesir's new wife Mary (not his second wife, Junior thought; he had never married Dolly Kratch) bent tenderly over it. Also central but behind, Aesir stood in Father Christmas costume. On one side, the three ghosts, wearing paper crowns, were taking presents from the tree. On the other, distant relatives and lesser employees crowded like amazed shepherds. The dogs and cats sat obediently round the playpen.

Aesir tucked a 50 sheet into the card, which Junior saw had the standard message in black ink, and To Bob with love from Dad" in Aesir's hand in blue. "Tell him to forget this humbug of spending Christmas in a soup-kitchen for losers. Other times, maybe. But he can't expect to come from a filthy den to be with Mary and the boys. Let's forget that, and we'll have a good old-fashioned family Christmas just like we used to!"



Junior rode the lift down and hurried out of the building. The sky was clear and winter-bright, the sun already low and the air cold. He moved through the narrow streets of the East End in the shadow of E. Ben Aesir's tower, the tallest building between the City and Canary Wharf. It was the first really big office overspill into the area east of Liverpool Street.

In corners and doorways, scruffy men sold a biggish magazine with the headline "THE TRUTH ABOUT THE NEW MILLENIUM WAS NOSTRADAMUS RIGHT?" Junior didn't buy one. Instead, he crossed Commercial Road and glanced back

He could see Aesir's tower dominating the low Victorian buildings and the narrow streets through which, in the last century, Bill Sikes had tried to escape justice and Jack the Ripper had succeeded. In a few days, Junior reminded himself, it would be the last century but one. The sun was already starting to reddish the sky and the mirrored windows of the building. Half way up, the maxiad screens which would convey Jesus Two Thousand to the crowds in the streets were already in position. One displayed the words "AESIRCO HAPPY 2000 BIRTHDAY JESUS FROM THE WORLD!"

The "Stable," temporary headquarters of CRASH (Campaign for the Right to All-year Shelter and Housing) was in an old warehouse in a street off Brick Lane. It was intended to smell of disinfectant, which it did, even above the cooking from the three curry houses in the street and the stench of the mash from the huge brewery. Even with all that, Junior couldn't avoid wrinkling his nose at a smell like a thousand mornings-after rolled into one: of blankets hair and clothing soaked in sweat, beer, smoke and things he didn't wish to identify. This was so even though most of the sheltered were out, begging or panhandling the price of minimal Christmas shopping. Near the main entrance was a door marked "Office" beyond he could see a huge space lined with beds and sleeping bags and hung with Christmas chains in a style several years out of date.

Junior hastily knocked at the office door and was called in. There was a battered wooden desk, not many papers on it, and in the corner an ancient green-plastic Christmas tree, with plenty of home-made decorations but no presents beneath it. Bob Kratch was there, talking to another man and two young women: all four wore a near-uniform of blue jeans and functional jumpers. Bob was his male self: unfashionably short hair and no make-up or jewellery to distinguish him from the other charity workers.

"Fred! That is, Junior! Happy Christmas! Good to see you!"

"Yule. Same to you, Bob. Thought I'd stop by. Get my card?"

"It's at the flat."

"Great. Look, I've got your prezzy, and one from your Dad – unless you are coming on Christmas Day of course."

"I haven't been invited."

"Well, I think the old man will invite you if you get in touch to finalize the arrangements."

"Finalize? Christ! I have to beg for an invite from my own Dad now, do I?"

Before Bob could go on, the other man said: "We can take over now, Bob, if you two want to get off."

"Thanks!" Bob took a leather jacket from the hook. The "Mane Kelly" opens all day if you fancy a pint?"

Before Junior could reply a youth who looked about 14 burst in. He was short hair roughly crew-cut, with red blotches on his pale face which could have been acne but looked more sinister. "Bob, give us a quid to get some disfungus from the Pakis. We're right out in the khazi."

One of the girls said: "Knock, Tim!" Bob unlocked a drawer and took out a coin which he tossed lightly to Tim's right hand. The latter nevertheless fumbled and dropped it, saying "Whoops! In training for England goalie!"



As they walked to the pub, Junior said: "That kid. He looked incredibly young."

"Tim? He was 18 last week."

"Good thing he didn't try going into my club to celebrate."

"I don't like to go on, but he's had all the problems we get used to. Dad flat-broke and vanished, mum on the booze. He's a throwback to the days before all kids had milk and vitamins."

The "Mane Kelly" was indeed open. On one side of the sign, Mane was shown issuing saucily from the pub, on the other, she was shrinking from the shadow of the Ripper. Inside the place was full: crowds of seasonal revellers obscuring the Ripper prints on the walls. Junior said: "I really admire you working with kids like that Tim!"

"It's a job. There's no need to whinge about it. Drink? Pezzig's Yuletide Dark is nice and strong. He ordered two pints, and they found a tiny table, the last, and stools. Junior handed over his present: a year's pass for the club and the latest Topper Sisters CD. Bob gave a cursory thanks, and replied with an unwrapped book *Global Economy and Ecology in the New Millennium: Degradation and Poverty?* He glanced briefly at his father's card, tucked the 50 into his jeans, and got straight on to his main preoccupation.

"If I do get in touch, I'll get no compromise toe-the-line. I can cope with not cross-dressing at Christmas, even if it does relax me provided he doesn't call me 'it'."

"That's a good compromise," Junior muttered.

"I'm not a true transsexual. I know that now. I realized it when I thought of begging Dad for the money for the op. I knew at once I didn't want it that much." He half-drained his pint of strong beer. "I found a shrink who's a bit more sensible than most, and we worked out it only started when Mum left."

Junior considered. He hadn't seen Dolly Kratch since E Ben Aesir went from making music to selling it and the real money started to flow. Dolly had disappeared soon after that. Still, everyone knew her videos, and it was true that Bob's female persona did resemble her stage self, especially the wild but controlled hair, like Prince of Wales ostrich feathers. He didn't want to get into that, so he asked: "How is Aunt Dolly anyway?"

"OK. She went back to Austria for a bit, now she's somewhere in the Middle East. Anyway, I know if I dress up, cross-dress, for Christmas dinner it'll set a bad role model for the twins, or to be exact, freak Mary out. So, scratch that. What I can't abide is being told dinner is at one, and it's broadcast! It always used to be after the Queen, about half three!"

"Even you don't sleep in till one, do you?"

"Bloody don't! The whole point of working for CRASH is to be there at Christmas. These people need me more than anyone needs the Aesir family describing the Christmas schedule from the dinner table! Who does he think he is the bloody Queen?"

Junior shrugged. "OK. Unk goes overboard, but the fact is the economy needs Christmas. I need it! If it wasn't for Yuletide trade, Club Munch'em would hardly break even!"

Bob ignored the argument as one he'd often got too involved in. "Anyway, so I compromise again. If I work Christmas Eve till midnight, I can maybe trade the whole of Christmas Day off. But I want some trade for that. I wanted one carol in this obscenaganza to be from the Stable. We've got some good singers, you know. Just to show you know it's obvious. We were discussing doing 'Good King W' or 'Once in Royal David's'! Would he hear of it? NO!" Bob sat back and shouted to the barman for two more pints. "Are you involved?"

A few carols from the club, yes.'

'I see With the dancing girls and their boobies?'

'No Definitely not them.'

'I didn't think so' He started on the second pint, became more reflective. 'You know, at least Dad's consistent in one way. When I was little, when we were on the road. Dad used to say there was no point in treating the symptoms of society's illness, which I suppose is what I do now.'

Junior didn't argue. He too had once heard SKRU-1 say that



Christmas Eve was even brighter and colder than the last few days. No snow was forecast, but there would be frost in London. Christmas would be quite white enough for anyone still sleeping out. At the Club Munch'em, two yuletide murals, one of a cannibal enjoying himself, the other of a clubber pretending to swallow something which of course no one ever did consume at the club, had been hidden by big video-screens. There would be tight checks on the door for the broadcast, and during it the only drink available was low-alcohol punch. Stewards showed regulars to their tables, one or two fashionably dressed girls who liked to be near the cameras complaining that they had been shunted unceremoniously to the back. Tables near the front had been allocated to the nurses who were to do 'The Twelve Days of Christmas'. Junior had doubts about some of their dresses but couldn't do much about them. On the stage, a voice trial for 'Mary's Boy Child' was under way, with lots of yells of 'next' from the audience. It was crowded and cheerfully chaotic.

At 9.30, the screens lit up. There were checks to Manger Square in Bethlehem, to Trafalgar Square, scene of the main British event, to locations in America. All the crowds could see themselves or the others on huge screens. There were some choirs in surplices, but mostly just soberly dressed people, men in grey overcoats, women in white ones. Some parts of Trafalgar Square were occupied by less committed revellers, and camera angles were chosen which didn't show them.

At ten to ten Aesir spoke to the active participants across the world. 'Remember folks, this is a live broadcast in honour of Jesus and his Two Thousandth, brought to you by the AesirCo satellite, but don't worry about stage fright. If you forget your lines, don't worry, they'll be there on the screens. It is live, but if there are delays or hitches, this isn't an old-type karaoke system. The AesirCo computers will make sure you always have exactly the right lines on the screens at the exact moment you need them, in whatever language you need them.'

At five to ten, adverts ended. It was stressed that there would be none during the global carol service itself. Mary Aesir introduced the live broadcast, which began with the scene in Manger Square, followed by 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing' from a mall in Texas where it was still daylight. Junior tensed as E. Ben Aesir said, 'And now folks, for a different side of Yuletide, over to a club in London's West End!'

The 'Twelve Days' began. He hadn't known the nurses meant to leap on and off chairs when each group came to its present, and there were a few vulnerable dresses, especially among the Turtle Doves and French Hens, but there were no accidents. But there was one disturbing detail. Junior's cellphone rang halfway through and Future's voice yelled above the noise: 'What do you know about this balls-up on the fifth

day?'

'Nothing! Seems OK to me!'

'The singing's OK. Look at the screen!'

The fifth day came round for the fifth time. At once junior noticed that instead of 'a partridge in a pear tree,' the true love had sent 'A new AesirCo CD', though it was supposed to be an ad-free broadcast. 'I see what you mean, but no one here's looking at the words on the screen.'

'The punters at home will though.'

'Well, don't blame me for anything your computer puts up there. That's notting to do with me!'

Apart from that the 'Twelve Days' were a great success. While the club was off the air for a carol from Trafalgar Square he warned the clubbers against too much reliance on the screen. Unfortunately, that led a group of them to study it and sing along raucously with each incoming carol.

'Mary's Boy Child' was almost due. The club numbers would be got out of the way early. The chosen singers came to the stage and made a horseshoe. At first all went well, but on the second chorus, junior's phone went again. Future said: 'Boss wants to know who that bloke is in the middle of the horseshoe!'

'There's no one in the middle. It's a perfect ...'

E. Ben Aesir must have grabbed to phone. 'Look! Who's that idiot, the damn Pip Marlow impersonator, in the middle of your stage?'

'There's no one in the middle! They're nearly all girls ...'

'Look, you idiot, look at the screen. Use your eyes!'

He looked at the screen and gaped. In mid-stage, dancing much more wildly than the girls and making lewd gestures at them, was a dishevelled figure in black leather over-decorated with studs and chains. Junior realized that it did look a bit like Marlow, but a much younger Marlow in his singer-DI days.

'There's still no one on the real stage! No one! This lash-up is nothing to do with me! It must be... some kind of animation interference. Christ! What's that!'

The words on the screen were wrong. The third chorus read

'Long time ago in Birmingham'

'The Palace won away'

'And we will win the Football League'

'Because of Boxing Day!'

Everyone knew E. Ben Aesir was a director of Crystal Palace. His investment had contributed to their recent league title win. No one on the stage resembled the leather-and-chains Marlow, nor had they sung from the screens, but the mikes had picked up the raucous alternative version from some of the audience.

'If there's no one imitating Marlow there, some insider is trying to set me up! Family Conference, down here, now!'



Junior sent a steward for his coat, and another to move his Honda Mangajet to the front, roared off past the queue of people without tickets. Luckily he'd been drinking the same punch as the others. It was freezing on Charing Cross Road and he wasn't wearing his helmet. He weaved through traffic and revellers, was briefly distracted by a coldproof girl in a sleeveless dress so low it was almost topless, almost collided with a middle-aged aged football supporter in the colours, ironically, of the Palace. He grabbed his brake and just missed the man, who must have been drunk, for he fell

over anyway

"Hey, You, YES YOU, are you gonna stop?" He looked round. Two younger men, also Palace supporters, were running towards him. He roared up to 60 by the next lights which he just beat, screamed the brakes again on seeing a police line around the square. Luckily, his Aesir family pass got him through. He weaved more carefully through the non-participating crowd at the edge. A lot of these people were gesturing at the screens and the main party on the podium. He drove as far as he could, stopped the engine and stood on his footrests. He could just see that E. Ben Aesir had left the front of the podium and was hunched over the control console with Future. Mary Aesir was doing a totally uncharacteristic wild dance, swinging her arms through the air as if hitting at someone invisible.

He realized that the music was totally wrong, more like a 1980s rap than a carol. Whatever it was, the crowd's efforts to sing it were a disaster. He looked at the screen and saw that Mary was hitting in the direction of another phantom figure. This time he realized it was a younger version of Aesir, all in black and studs, though with fewer chains than Marlow. The words on the screen read:

It's DJ-SKRU-J's Xmas rap

'Leave out all that Yuletide crap

'What's for you in Santa's sack?

'Not so much if you are black!'

He realized it was a version of an ancient SKRU-I hit which he hardly remembered, for it had never been re-released. The figure on the screen was moving suggestively in a dance roughly synchronized with Mary's wild swings. As he watched, Past and Present moved to the front of the stage and led Mary very firmly to the back. He waved his pass at the police line and pushed through. Virtual-Aesir was yelling:

'Christmas trees are all endangered'

'Most of them are acid-rain-dead!'

He reached the console just as the rap ended. Future was saying '...no way we can stop him doing it without crashing the whole system.'

'Stop who doing what?' Junior found himself asking.

"It's Marlow's damn interactive," Aesir shouted. It's infested the system. He never liked the way we were going but he couldn't swing the board. This is his pathetic revenge. We have to stop him!

"It's Bethlehem next," Future said. "What can he do there?"

As if in answer the screen cleared, and the chain-jacketed Marlow came on. He was shown walking down a narrow old street, lined on one side by grim terraces where impoverished clerks might have lived, on the other by the even meaner fronts of counting-houses. It was lit only by gas, but a more generous light played over the Marlow-figure glinting on the chains as he said: "That was DJ SKRU-I. Remember him? Now known as E. Ben Aesir. Now to Bethlehem and Dolly Kratch. Remember her? Mother of SKRU, sorry Ben s. son Bob. Old Bob hasn't been allowed to sing 'Once in Royal David's City from a Stable in London' but now his mum is going to sing it from Manger Square!"

E. Ben Aesir almost screamed. "It's not possible! It's not possible!" as Dolly appeared on the podium of the ceremony in Manger Square. "Stop it! Get her off! Off!"

"Hold on," Future said. "Look, she's singing it straight and it'll take time..."

"That's not she! That's an it, a part of Marlow's damned interactive! Get it off!"

"OK, I might just be able to isolate cameras, transmitters, satellite, screens from the computer net, but it'll mean crashing the whole thing and Marlow could be in the 'Do it! Crash it! Now!'

Dolly's voice filled the square. It wasn't a pure voice, but sincere. Unlike the other illusions, she looked her real age. The people who had stopped singing during the rap joined in.

Just after "With the poor and mean and lowly Future hit something and said "Now!" The lyrics vanished from the screens, but Dolly and the crowd kept singing "Lived on Earth our Saviour Holy."

Future said "Hold on. Most of the gear is disconnected from the computer and she's still there. I'll try the separate radio - what's happening to the monitor?"

Dolly was still on the big screens, but the small console monitor was filling with what looked like handwriting. Future said: "Well, the computer didn't crash completely, but that is her - she's on the radio which doesn't use it."

She can't be..."

At that point Bob Kratch ran up. He was plainly dressed apart from a hat with feathers. He said "Dad, thank you so much for including Mum in this! But why didn't you say I..."

E. Ben Aesir said "It wasn't exactly me." He was looking at the monitor, which had scrolled up a hand-written letter, his hand, inviting Dolly to sing in Bethlehem. "Say it was my damn partner. He's trying to screw everything! But I won't let him!"

Past and Present returned from wherever they had taken Mary. Past was saying "...all her idea. Not businesslike at all!"

Present nodded. "Now it's totally screwed up!"

"No!" Aesir shouted. "No one man, ghost or machine, is gonna say on my satellite that E. Ben Aesir won't put a carol on and then pirate it on himself!"

Junior shrugged. "He has said it!"

"But I can still do it. It's not even half past. Son, can you ring your stable and tell them they're on for 'Good King Wenceslas' at least? Junior, you got that fast bike? Take Bob and get down the East End. I'll get a camera crew to you by the end of the show." He turned on Past and Present, pulling cash from his wallet. "You two get after them and scour the Brick Lane curry shops for the biggest Christmas Eve take-away in history. OK, you think I'm mad. Well, they thought a singer-DJ was mad to take on serious business, and I'm not finished yet!"

It was organized by the time Dolly finished singing. E. Ben Aesir didn't leave with the others; he listened to the end of her carol, suddenly feeling nostalgic.

Yuletide might not be successful, but he was starting to have a happy Christmas.



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To begin with a dream: it goes without saying that true lovers of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* would ideally prefer a *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* that was more openly about Mary Shelley. Indeed, it's hard to see how a 1990s reading of the original novel – or arguably novels can be anything else. Certainly biographers take it for granted that, in the original text of 1816-7, the monster's relationship with its creator refracts, in varying degrees, Mary's own relationships with William Godwin, with Shelley, and with her own dead mother and daughter, and that the notably soggy 1831 revision overwrites these with Mary's own relationship with her book, expressing her radical recompilation of her personal story in the more fatalistic and conformist terms in which she had by then recreated herself from the dead tissue of her lost life with Shelley. This second text – the true *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* inasmuch as it was the first to which she put her name – is usually and irresistibly, seen as a retrospective reinterpretation of her own youth's creation to assimilate her struggles after Shelley's death in 1822, her muting of her own parents' radical rationalisms under a blanket of romantic Stoicism, her careful reconciliation with the public in the role of serious novelist and exemplary literary widow, and the popular notoriety of her creation. Its celebrated preface on the book's making, a document whose magnificent obfuscations border on genius, responds with calculated disingenuousness to years of exacerbating FAQs about how what Beckford called 'the foulest Toadstool that has yet sprung up from the reeking dunghill of present times' could properly be the work of a dimwitted teenager whose only experience of darkness and distance had been an austere and unmothered childhood, an escape into adultery, exile and excoriation, a distressing string of familial estrangements and suicides, and a gruesome series of dead babies.

That preface itself, as a work of autobiographical fiction, is sufficiently mythic to have spawned its own film lineage from the prologue and double-casting in *Brake of Frankenstein* via the torpid abysses of *Goduk* and *Haunted Summer* to the monstrously mixed blessing of Roger Corman's Brian Aldiss's *Frankenstein Unbound* and a particularly misleading fragment that actually recurs in an uncredited voiceover (presumably Helena Bonham Carter's) over the title *Mary Shelley's before FRANKENSTEIN* comes up. But while it's a matter for regret that this solitary, disembodied cameo is Mary's only emergence in the film, there's a paradoxical sense in which Beanaigh and his writers, in dedicating their *Frankenstein* as *Mary Shelley's*, can reasonably claim to be

perfectly faithful to that version of the novel to which its creator gave her name: a version which masked her own presence in the tale by reintroducing it as a gleeful horror story with a dire moral whose complex resonance with her own experience is accidental, retrospective and confined to the period after its making. (The frankest prologue to a *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* would be a dramatisation of Mary's journal entry for March 19, 1815 –

Dream that my little baby came to life again – that it had only been cold & that we rabbed it before the fire & it lived – I awoke & find no baby – I think about the little thing all day – not in good spirits

which should properly be inscribed on the flyleaf of every copy of the novel. I suppose we should be grateful that Hollywood would never in a million years dream of daring.)

And in fact, there are several innovations in Branagh's revisionary film – thoughtful, inventive, and laudably well-meant, if at times monumentally flat or silly – that hint at considerable sensitivity to the autobiographical elements in the book. Victor's mother, for example, dies not of a fever but in childbirth (as Mary Wollstonecraft died from bearing the

author), at the birth of Victor's beloved and doom-destined brother William (named, as in the novel, for the Shelleys' first son whom the author was nursing as the book took shape and who survived its publication by only a year). *Frankenstein's* journal is a rite-of-passage gift from his dead mother, the first page inscribed by her own hand – just as Percy Shelley's was the first hand in Mary's own famous journal, begun with their elopement in 1814. Like *Mary Frankenstein*, is driven to creation by the impossible desire to reverse the loss of loved ones: first mother, then mentor, then spouse. Most strikingly of all, the film is saturated in images of childbirth, alien to the novel but central to the circumstances of its creation: from the impressively graphic fate of Victor's mother to the extraordinary scene of naked Creature and creator slimly wrestling in a waterbirth of amniotic fluid.

How much, if any, of this is deliberate allusion for the pleasure of MWS transpotters remains impossible to tell. But it at least testifies to an address to the novel immeasurably more intelligent, complex, serious, faithful in spirit and coherent in milieu and style than Coppola's preposterous *Dracula* – in pretty much the same degree as Branagh's film is duller, more conventional, and less flamboyantly commercial. There doesn't seem any easy way round the fact that, where *Dracula* made a twisted caricature of Stoker's creation and soaked up money like a bandage on an open throat wound, *Frankenstein* preserves more of the tissue of its reconstituted beloved than any film version before it; yet seems unlikely to survive a head-to-head with *Interview With the Vampire*. Nobody's fault; it's just that slurping the blood of virgins in eighties is jolly erotic, whereas making people out of corpses has all the sexual charge of a rainy Sunday afternoon in Warrington.

At the very least, we should be grateful that *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* is *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* to the extent that it is an elaboration of the novel rather than of any of the hundred or so stage versions or the two hundred or so earlier films. As all good Famous Monsters saddoos know, Universal's *Frankenstein* – like its stablemate *Dracula*, and all the feature-film descendants of both – took nothing of substance direct from the novel. It came rather from the long line of stage versions, running from Richard Brinsley Peake's 1823 *Presumption, or The Fate of Frankenstein* to Peggy Webling's

## Nick Lowe

# MUTANT POPCORN

1927 play the ultimate source of Whale's screenplay and the 21st of its line. The vital signs of this tradition of theatrical Frankensteins are a mute or severely maimed monster, an anachronized Victor offset by tiresome comic peasants, and the drastic compression of the novel's globespanning travelogue and elaborate concentric frames (Walton's letters, Frankenstein's story, the monster's narrative) into a single day's action in and around the family seat. There's also a tendency to reshuffle the romantic pairings pretty much ad lib with Victor, Henry Clerval, and Felix De Lacey available for matchmaking with any of Elizabeth, Justine, Agatha, and Safie the Turk.

Now *Mary Shelley's* does repudiate the stage tradition's cinematic descendants in reinstating Walton and the Arctic frame, stripping Victor of his Baronetcy (though not of his gothic pile), and restoring articulacy to the Creature (sic: intriguingly restoring Webbing's own term for the previous century's 'monster'). But at the same time it's not ashamed to appropriate many of the inventions of the Frankenstein movies — the lightning, the laboratory the pointlessly van stanscapes the grave-robbing, criminal corpses, and transplanted brains — and, more significantly, the sense of opportunistic flexibility in the central characters and relationships where the combined, or opposed ingenuities of Hollywood and Blightywood have busied themselves blind to think of a story. Such a creation could have been unspeakably dire, as it mostly was in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* itself, a monstrous confection from shreds and patches of dead predecessors whose potential for good as perverted to criminal ghastliness by the inhuman insensitivity of its own maker. But what's remarkable about the Branagh gang's attempt to create a mate for their monster is that what comes out of



the tank, for all its dramatic unevenness, is easily the most thoughtful, relevant, and morally sophisticated Frankenstein since Mary's, and certainly the most ingeniously reassembled from the disjointed sumfins of its precursors, as well as being the first fully to succeed in updating its Promethean problem for a different, but no less hubristic scientific age.

It's no secret here that the screenplay went through more hands than are credited, and that the Darsbont-Branagh posse took charge of a draft from the Zoetrope team that had been significantly further from the novel. It's still a shame to lose the scenes in Orkney and Ireland, the trial of Justine Monte, the Turkish subplot and intercultural romance (possibly too politicized to survive in this version), the most famous closing line in all of JMSF goes out, predictably in a blaze of glory, and even 'I will be with you on your wedding night' (cumbrously rewritten in one of the film's numerous excesses of ingenuity). The new Henry Clerval is more of a spare duster than ever forgotten entirely in the hokule, and there's a lot of flimsy patching at the climax of

Justine's story. But there's much neat repploting of such elements as the locket, Justine's corpse, and Walton's decision to turn back from the pole, and the major new twist at the climax is astutely set up and nothing like as silly as it threatens to be with some nice if presumably coincidental echoes of Aldiss. And above all given that the thankless and mescapable brief is once again to reanimate the novel as a love story and its message as *Love Never Dies*, it's astonishing how deftly Branagh's gang hijack the vehicle to pilot it back to the central concerns of the book.

The vitalizing force of this rebirth is a subtle but significant shift of centre. Where Mary Shelley's Frankenstein was about creating life, *Mary Shelley's* is about undoing death. And while nobody in Hollywood or the ticket-buying masses is particularly excited by the former especially after 200 earlier movies have unanimously opined what a jolly bad thing it is, the latter is not only the principal obsession of everyone west of the Sierra Nevada but the one scientific goal everyone in the world can identify with — to the point that Victor's attacks of conscience seem if anything rather excessive. It does force some tricky rewriting of the novel's central concept of the Creature as a moral tabula rasa, since Victor is now interested not merely in the general benefaction of mortals at large but in the reanimation of specific beloved individuals — so that the issue of precisely whose brain is transplanted to his Creature and how much of their former identity is retained, is paramount. But the script deals with this through a well devised ethical debate between maker and monster over whether the corpses pillaged for scrap are anonymous, ownerless 'raw materials' or people with identities and rights inalienable even by death.

This is such good stuff that it's the greater pity that the dialogue, drama, and performances never quite match up. Helena Bonham Carter is particularly dreary casting, unable to shake off her unvalued chain of previous roles as a period wet, and crippling the attempt to strengthen the Elizabeth character while the supporting players seem to be hewn from a peculiar variety of costume cardboard fondly remembered from the golden age of Hammer right down to the personality-free RSC-accented Swiss peasants. Branagh himself never the most charismatic of screen presences for all his gothic enthusiasm behind the camera and positively Promethean skills as producer is surprisingly unconvincing as Victor — especially given that he seems to be playing, if not himself, then at least the less amiable side of his public image. De Niro meanwhile does undeniably interesting work by the standards of his predecessors but scarcely shines by his own. His very actorly reading of the Creature ('you gave me these emotions,' the star tells his director in the glacier scene, 'but you didn't tell me how to use them') is full of bravura professional set pieces like the extended

Below: Richard Briers as The Blind Man and Robert DeNiro as The Creature





**H**e stopped in a dark passage and unloaded the caravan. Clotted blood smeared his shirt, but he was indifferent to that. He lurked in the deeper shadows and peered around the dusty courtyard with its crumbling walls, hoping for one glimpse through the upstairs window.

He felt a neighbour's curious eyes watching him through the wall of shimmering heat. He could see nothing. It was close to noon.

The echoing street noise seemed remote and strange.

The rotten meat stank. It was old and riddled with maggots. That wouldn't matter to the creature inside his house. That ever-hungry freak would devour anything. The worms themselves were its food.

Ellen loved the goods.

When she and Tom happened upon the market, Ellen felt a rush of happiness as intense as the pleasures of childhood. The market was a tumble of strange noises, colours, odours. These goods had all the deep mystery of the unknown countries of their origin.

She walked among the booths, tiny counters, small stands, loose piles of wares on a single woolen tablecloth. She admired handwoven fabrics, ivory carvings and crystal chalices. Her eyes were caught by china bowls, plates, gleaming jars and vases racked on long wooden shelves. She was charmed by vivid sheens of fabric, by dark Asian faces obscured in shadows, by loud alien voices.

It was all so wonderful, so strange.

The market seemed unimaginably large, crowded, and rich. Furs lay on the ground in careless heaps. They fascinated her with their promise of softness and warmth. She knelt suddenly and touched them, then stroked them with both her hands, and, finally, buried her face in them. She longed never to go home, to stay here forever, to be dissolved in the market's goods, or to dissolve the goods inside herself.

Later, she bought spices, strange vegetables and cartons of black tea. The goods seemed unbelievably cheap. She and Thomas then decided on a wooden pony for Lucas, and the toy was cheap, too.

Cheap even by their meagre standards.

"Thomas, maybe we can even buy a carpet here," she said.

They'd wanted a carpet ever since their arrival here in exile, six months ago. There was little joy in sleeping in bags, or in walking on a concrete floor covered with newspapers. So far there had always been far more pressing uses for the little money Thomas managed to earn. It was hard for Thomas and Ellen Braunstein to get used to exile and privation. Once they had been so rich.

Ellen tightly gripped her husband's hand and leaned against his ear amidst the noisy babble of the marketplace. "There are bound to be carpets here, don't you think? And they can't all be expensive!"

Tom nodded at his wife. He felt reluctant, but he knew she was right; a cheap carpet would be a great advantage to them. They began searching, and walked narrow aisles among casks of olives, past counters of dried fish and exotic fruits. At length they neared one edge of the market. The crowd of buyers had grown thin and the racket of voices was far behind them.

"Thomas? Here's some!" He turned to see Ellen pointing at a booth. The carpet stall was half-hidden in a courtyard niche, surrounded by high walls on three sides. The carpets

were heaped on the stand's wooden frame, displayed on racks above the counter, fastened to the walls and still more lay in rolled heaps all around. A cotton sail hung like a tent overhead, shadowing the courtyard, protecting the delicate tints of the carpets from the sunlight.

With a shock, Tom suddenly realized that he and his wife were the only customers.

"Let's go back, Ellen," he muttered.

"What? We can at least look around. Ask the price, for heaven's sake. We don't have to buy it right away!"

It's so... deserted here."

"Well, that's even better!"

Ellen stepped forward and examined the goods. She fingered the threading of the uppermost carpet in a heap. The patterns were dazzling and the colours so vivid that they glowed even in the dim light through the overhead sail.

"We could use a carpet for our bedroom," she said to the counterman. "A little carpet will do fine," she added hastily.

The counterman stepped lazily from his high stool. He stretched back without looking and seized a carpet-roll leaning against the wall. With a deft flick of the wrists, he flung it open across the counter.

"The best in stock for you, ma'am."

The carpet was as soft as cat's fur, and deep green. Its greenness was perfect, like the manicured green lawn at the house of Ellen's parents. There was no pattern woven into it, but when Ellen stroked it with her palm, it changed its sheen from dark to light.

Standing beside her, watching, Tom also felt a powerful urge to stroke the carpet. To rub it with his bare skin. To lean against it. To collapse into its depths. The feeling was ludicrous, but far too intense to resist. He brushed his knuckles lightly across the paling and felt a chill go through him.

Strange excitement rose within him. He stepped back to draw a breath, but it didn't rid him of his sudden intense fantasy. How wonderful it would be to make love to Ellen on that carpet.

He came to an instant decision.

"How much is it?"

The counterman grinned. His eyes moved to Ellen, to the carpet, and then to Tom again.

"You can take this little item. Mr. Braunstein, if you want it so much," said the counterman slowly. "For you, it is free."

Maggie Winston was 25 and already mother of four children. The children had changed her — imprisoned her in the unbreakable circle of housework, narrowed her horizon. Maggie claimed that motherhood had filled her with unspeakable happiness, but it had changed her unimaginably.

She had a vast solid bosom, wide hips, a waistline sunken in fat. And yet, she had a good temper. She was one of those women who seemed native to all parts of the world: they weren't born, they didn't die, they just changed their names.

"Four kids, five kids, what's the difference, Ellen?" Maggie waved her meaty hand. "I didn't mind watching him. Luke's a good baby."

Ellen put the baby back in her snuggle. Lucas was seven months old — he'd been born in a boat, on their way across the sea. Their little stateless child knew nothing of the harsh realities that had forced his parents to flee so quickly and so far.

"Oh, thank you so much, Maggie. You know, Tom and I found the most marvellous oriental open-air market. It's

close to the beach. Behind the 56th.

Ben Winston appeared in the shadowed doorway of the bedroom. He was pensive, dressed in the ratty old pullover he always wore. He nodded to Ellen, he gave her body the usual lingering once-over with his eyes but he said nothing. Ben Winston never said anything. Ellen had never heard him say more than a few words.

'A market? Here in town? It must have been opened recently,' said Maggie.

'Come see my place. We've got a new carpet there,' said Ellen. She and Maggie stepped across the hall to the Braunein's flat. The carpet was already on the floor of their only room — soft, silky, looking as inviting as fresh grass. The carpet was smaller than the room, and there was a desolate border of bare concrete around it. But with the carpet brightening the place, even their cheap fabric-covered packing-crates gave an illusion of comfort.

When Maggie left, Ellen fed Lucas and put him to sleep, she and Thomas ate little and didn't bother with cooking.

They locked up, and turned off the light.

They had to do all the interesting things in pitch darkness, for they had no curtains for the windows.

The carpet was a joy and wonder in the days that followed.

In the windowed sunshine, Ellen could witness its full beauty. Stripes of darker and lighter green followed each other like the crests and troughs of waves. Somehow, it reminded her of home, the house of her early childhood: mysterious, silent, shrouded by moss and ivy. She could not resist its allure and stroked and touched the carpet frequently. At first she told herself that this was accidental, but as the days went on she surrendered that pretence. She walked on the carpet barefoot, then bent from the waist to brush it with both hands. She never put Lucas in his makeshift cradle any more, but made him a bed on the carpet.

She was very careful with it: the very thought of damaging or staining her carpet was maddening. It had to stay clean, entirely free of grit or crumbs or morsels. She was obsessive: she brushed the carpet several times a week, and when Thomas wasn't there to watch her, she even fine-combed its long green nap.

Sometimes she would isolate some noxious bit of lint, a stray hair — but never any food.

Four weeks went by.

Then the baby disappeared.

They informed the police of the kidnapping, but received only grim suspicion. The local police despised refugees of their sort, and it was clear that the cops thought they had murdered their own child — or sold him. It was just like the gloom and terror in their own lost homeland, the fear they had once hoped to escape.

Their threats and ancient slurs panicked Ellen, and she retreated to their room. As days passed she felt surrounded by a rising tide of unbearable hatred. Everyone and everything seemed rancorous, bitter, plotting maliciously against them — even their few wretched possessions seemed to bear them a grudge. One evening, as they sat empty in their rooms, desperate and hopelessly alone, Ellen broke the silence.

'We're truly cursed people, Thomas. Our escape, our fleeing here, that was all just an illusion. There's no refuge for us anywhere. We can never run far enough. The whole world

# The



*Vilma Kadleckova*

around us has nothing to offer us but hatred, hatred, hatred

It seemed a sin to bring another human being into such a world, but Ellen longed for another child. It seemed the only chance at life, the only chance to defeat their overwhelming sorrow. The urge to bear another child was stronger with each passing day – life would go on that way. Humanity would somehow continue.

She and Thomas made love in the velvet embrace of their carpet. And lay there side by side, afterward, their sweating backs pressed into its soft warmth.

She awoke in darkness. It was midsummer and the sun had been rising early. Behind their still uncurtained window the sky was growing light, with the promise of another day, maybe a beautiful day.

She yawned and stretched her arms.

Anxiety struck her. Her posture was all wrong, her body gone strangely stiff. She ran her hands down her breasts and stomach, then down to her womb, filled with precious seed now like pearls in a cave. And she screamed in terror when she touched the monstrous remnants of her thighs, nothing left of her legs now, nothing there but warm, moist, unbearably soft and fluffy carpet.

The carpet, of course, was bigger now. It filled every square inch of the floor from wall to wall and it had rooted itself through the desolate flooring somehow, it was too tenacious to be ripped up or torn away. It resisted blows and beatings and defied the touch of a knife. Thomas didn't dare to destroy the carpet in any case. He was afraid of what it might do to Ellen. Writhing sheets of dark and lighter green striped across the carpet's surface now, expressions of some scale of primitive emotions: delight, anger, satiation, hunger. It was much more than a mere beast, and showed real cunning, even a queer intelligence. If its island spots and patches of lighter green grouped together in the ocean of darker green, that meant anger and hunger. And if it weren't fed, it would simply consume more and more of Ellen's body, cell by cell.

Any sort of meat would satisfy it.

It devoured any cheap carnage he threw at it – and it grew. To feed it, Thomas had to drop solid tiles across its surface, and jump from foothold to foothold. He would fling the meat aside, staggering off-balance, then stare in disgust as the meat vanished utterly in a sea of boiling green.

"You shouldn't ever feed it," Ellen whispered.

"Don't talk about that."

"You can see that it's growing."

"I haven't any choice."

"Thomas, You need to kill me."

He was angry with her. "We won't discuss that!"

"We have to. We have to face up to that. Thomas, I've been dead for two months. I'm already dead. Just look at me! How can you go on with this cruelty? You know that in the end there will be nothing left of me but –

The passion in her voice forced him to stare at her. Deliberately she threw aside her gown, showing the remains of the pale body he'd once found so arousing. The thing had been at her again, she'd lost maybe a finger's width of her torso to the green immersion. The stealthiness of it was hideous – a death like some endless, irresistible theft.

"Every day it takes me more quickly. Don't you even realize that? You can't keep pawning it off with kitchen trash like in the beginning – it killed our child, and it wants richer meat

all the time. The day has to come when you run out of food for it. Then whatever you bring it later just won't be enough."

Tom could not imagine what went through Ellen's head during those long silent hours alone while he scrounged the rotten provender for the creature infesting his home. It seemed amazing that she had not plunged far past the edge of madness, that anything like her old self, her sweetness and sensibility, had survived. He could not decide whether her madness in these circumstances would be good or bad. He had lost all standards of sane judgement, and forever crossed the borders of reality.

In the days that followed they could still talk together, though sometimes the madness would surge up in a rush of deep emotion and they would begin to rave.

"I've been searching for the marketplace again," he told her. "I couldn't find it when I looked for it that day when it happened to you. But I've searched again and again, so many times. It occurred to me, if only we could track down where the carpet came from, learn something about the original source of it, about its real origins."

"That's our fate," she blurted. "Searching forever for the real origins of everything."

He stared at her blankly. "What?"

"To search forever for the place that gives us all the goods."

Thomas shifted uneasily. His perch on the tiling in the middle of the carpeted floor was none too steady. The tile seemed to vibrate beneath him as if there were no firm foothold left on earth, and when he looked at his wife again, he felt the sudden conviction that at last her madness was genuine.

"I don't want to hurt you talking about it, Ellen," he said. "But I've been there so many times. I mean, a whole marketplace simply can't disappear like that. You remember how huge it was, we almost got lost inside it. I thought to myself, they've closed down the business, they've packed up the goods and dismantled the stands and trucked it all away, but Ellen, there's not even a space left. There's nothing at all behind 56th, the area there simply doesn't exist, it's just –" He couldn't go on.

"The harbour?" she prompted.

"Yes, just a deserted harbour."

"I know that I've seen it too."

"You have?" His eyes widened. He was surprised to hear her confess this knowledge, but it also seemed peculiar, almost shocking, to recall a time when his wife was free to move around by herself. Those now-improbable, unlikely memories of a time when Ellen could actually go somewhere.

"I tried to find the marketplace on the day that Lucas vanished. And I saw for myself that there was nothing there but water. I don't know why I never told you about that, Tom. Maybe it was just too hard to admit to myself – that the whole marketplace was nothing but empty water."

She gazed around the narrow room, her eyes distant and clouded.

"You remember how the counterman knew our names though we never told him? Somehow he knew who we really are – or what we really were, back in those days."

"Certainly, Ellen."

"Don't humour me! The goods were meant for us, specifically for us, for nobody else but you and me. It was all created just for us. The marketplace. The carpet. The harbour."

"Ellen

"A market, a carpet, a harbour. It's so obvious... I've known the worst for a long time, really."

Tom was too frightened to speak. The look of madness stiffened her face, the words swimming through her head like fish in murky water. There was no human blood left inside her. Her veins emptied into the hungry mass of an alien being. The carpet shone the deep green of its monstrous contentment and he felt it would be safe to step across it, to touch her, to comfort her, but he didn't dare.

She began to sway slowly in place, eyes closed, fingering strands of her hair. "Marketplace carpetplace, harbour," she said in a singsong, "my Thomas will return there, la la la... because he does nothing but wander across the sea, from one end of the world to the other. Always looking for the place things come from, we only run and run... You'll run, Thomas, to some other distant place, the place where they sell straw, and spice, and coffee, and ivory, and fur, and tea..." She chanted the names of the goods blindly, in an eerie melody, her anchored body swaying in rhythm.

The waves of dark green, light green. Delight and anger, satiation and hunger.

Ben Winston stood uneasily on a piece of wooden board, puffing rapidly at a cigar. He couldn't seem to believe what he was seeing – he wouldn't meet their eyes. And yet he kept stealing eager glances at Ellen as she lay there languidly, half-embedded in the floor. They weren't glances of pity, or a terror of monstrosity. It looked almost something like affection.

"Yeah, well, Maggie's been askin'," he said. "But you're right, Tom. We'll just have to tell her that Ellen left somewhere, gone to the country or somethin'" Winston nodded brusquely, like a strong man with his mind made up, but he didn't move and his hands were shaking.

A sparkling cascade of cigar ash fell to the carpet.

There were footsteps in the hall, a sudden savage pounding at the door. "Herr Braenstein!" It was the downstairs neighbour, a Mr Rotenberg.

Rotenberg was a complex, nervous little man and now he sounded both indignant and scared witless.

"Herr Braenstein! I know you can hear me! Come down to my flat and take a look at this horrible stain!"

Tom stood frozen.

"Herr Braenstein!" Rotenberg kicked the door till it shook in its flimsy hinges.

"Are you there?" he shrieked. "Herr Braenstein!"

"Of course, of course I'm here!" The pounding stopped. Tom unlocked the door and slipped outside.

Ben Winston and Ellen were left alone.

He found the courage to look at her directly. He wasn't much for talk, and couldn't find the words to express his fascination. Her pale face, untouched mysterious, exotic, seemed to intoxicate him.

"It's like a forest," she said suddenly.

"What? Your face?"

"The room where Rotenberg lives. The ceiling's like a forest. The carpet's overgrown it completely."

He blinked, astonished. "You can see the carpet in Rotenberg's place?"

"I am the carpet."

Ben shuddered at the words, and at that moment despair

filled her and she realized the utter uselessness of everything.

"Ben. Dear Ben, do something for me."

"You just name it, Ellen."

"I want you to kill me. Please just kill me."

"No!"

"Kill me!"

"I couldn't do that, Ellen."

"You once said you'd do anything for me."

Pity showed on his face. Not the compassion of a man for a woman, but the pity of a sane man for a mad creature. She couldn't move him that way, she was too far gone. Because she was too crazy.

"Oh, God," she muttered. She looked away in defeat.

And she saw, by Ben's feet, small blackened spots in the carpet. Tiny patches burnt into its emerald surface. The ashes from his cigar. She felt a moment of terror, even then, at the damage to her precious carpet, and then she realized fire. Carpets could burn.

"Ben," she murmured.

"Yeah, um, I'm still here, Ellen."

The absurdity of it almost made her laugh. Now her hands were trembling, too.

"Just one little thing" she said. "You can do this for me can't you? Up on the shelf there, back behind me, where I can't reach – it's my baby's toy. Lucas's little wooden horse. Tom's hidden it from me, he doesn't want me to look at it, because of Lucas – but since Tom won't get it for me, won't you get it? I really want to see it, Ben."

Such an innocent request. The wooden pony from the marketplace.

When he reached for it, her clever fingers stole the matchbox from the baggy pocket of his pullover. She tucked them in her fist, and he noticed nothing as he handed her the toy. "Go see what they're doing downstairs," she said. "Maybe you can help them."

Without another word, he left her there.

She put the wooden toy in front of her, like kindling. She laughed then, in true madness, she laughed at the ugly mercy that allowed her to die so horribly. She laughed at the goods their life-destroying hatred, hatred, hatred.

She opened the box and methodically scattered little flaming stars. She was in the centre of a fairy-ring of dancing lightning-bugs.

She felt no pain as yet.

Now the flames began to feed on the green pelt of the carpet. Shimmers of green flickering at the rims of the ring of fire.

She began to sing.

The hem of her skirt bloomed in orange and gold.

(Translated by M. Kledma and Bruce Sterling)

**Vilma Kadlecová** lives in Prague, Czech Republic. She won the Karel Čapek Award for the best short story in 1990 (at the age of 19) and again in 1993. She has also published a first novel in her native country.

# The Tenacity of Evolution

Charles Platt



Perhaps you've heard of *Myst*, the first bona-fide science-fiction CD-ROM bestseller. Of course it's not really science fiction. Factually accurate, conscientiously realistic extrapolation doesn't really exist among the various visual media. It would be more accurate to describe *Myst* as an adventure game with science-fiction and fantasy elements. The player explores an imaginary island and uncovers a bunch of clues and portents, beasts and magical personae. The conception is slightly more adult and slightly more original than that of other CD-ROMs, and consequently it has been hailed as a revelation, a work of genius, final proof that multimedia has come of age and will ultimately sweep old-fashioned "linear" storytelling into oblivion.

This at least is the prediction that has been made by some disciples of multimedia, who seem to have succeeded in unnerving a few New York publishers to the point where they are now trying to

neutralize the threat by throwing money at it. When book rights to *Myst* were auctioned, the bidding went up to an unprecedented seven million dollars.

New York publishers have always tended to spend wildly when spurred by the fear of failing to leap aboard an appropriate bandwagon. They've heard about CD-ROMs; some of them have even sent CD-ROMs, and a little knowledge is dangerous enough to precipitate a buying frenzy, even though there is still no hard evidence that CD-ROMs will ever move far outside their initial mode as a reference tool. As one relatively sane and sceptical editor said to me: "For seven million dollars, I could have probably bought up the entire software development company that created *Myst*."

So, this editor didn't participate in the rush to buy multimedia tie-ins. He didn't need to, because he'd already bought a different piece of non-book entertainment book rights to a game named *Magic*. This is the first successful fantasy role-playing game to be built around a deck of cards (actually many decks). During 1994, *Magic* suddenly and mysteriously became known to almost every child under 18 on the North American continent, and achieved this with only a tiny amount of advertising and promotion.

Inevitably there are now *"Magic"* books. In fact, there will be one per month, and I am told that the first has shipped 300,000 copies — ten times the number that the publisher had expected. (That's a bit more successful than a similar attempt by the UK company Games Workshop to cash in on the success of their role-playing games.)

So what's really going on here? Are we seeing a major shift in the tastes and interests of teenagers for whom books have become boning? Is speculative literature destined to become a kind of subsidiary to the visual media, feeding off a primary audience created by products whose conception is tawdry and unoriginal by the standards of those who can still remember plots of novels written before 1960?

Before leaping to any alarmist conclusions, it helps to remember that while there have been a lot of CD-ROMs (and a lot of text-only adventure games before them), relatively few have sold more than 10,000 copies. Also, going back to first principles, the whole concept of interactive entertainment is of unproven value. Its exponents claim that consumers are eager for the empowerment that they enjoy when an adventure game offers them choices that will determine the development of the story. And yet three experiments with interactive television in selected US cities have shown that TV viewers don't want to interact. They prefer to be entertained.

This doesn't necessarily mean that they are being unimaginative or lazy. Consider the nature of interactive storytelling: it allows you, the reader, to determine how the story unfolds as you explore an imaginary world. This can be fun, but can it provide the kind of storytelling cathexis that readers are accustomed to? A story is

satisfying generally speaking, when it develops in response to the actions of highly motivated characters. As soon as we tamper with this relationship so that the story responds to the actions of the reader, the characters lose their authority and become mere pawns on a playing field.

Similarly when the reader is allowed to follow one path among many, the writer can no longer build dramatic tension, create carefully orchestrated revelations and lead the reader to an ending which seems satisfying because, in retrospect, it has an air of inevitability.

Adventure games may seem to do more than a mere book, but in the areas I have summarized above their structure forces them to do much less.

We should remember that books survived the advent of radio drama, motion pictures and television. Right now, the threat posed by CD-ROMs seems smaller, relatively speaking, than the competition which those other media created in the days when they were new and full of new promise.

**S**ome changes certainly have occurred in book publishing. Science fiction (I am told by various American editors and literary agents) is at its lowest ebb in 25 years. The demand for it simply isn't there any more. Heroic fantasy tales they say because readers are still not tired of reading about wizards and princesses.

And yet, I wonder if the poor sales of science fiction can be blamed, at least

partly on the lack of contemporary relevance in the material that editors are selecting for publication. Most editors really are not very enlightened when it comes to new technologies. (Why else would they bid seven million dollars for a CD-ROM tie-in?) Likewise, many writers are surprisingly out of touch. To the young reader who is savvy about computers, BBSs, Nintendo games and virtual reality, the typical science-fiction novel seems curiously old-fashioned — not because of its form, but because of its content.

The few books that do show a genuinely modern awareness of technology can sell surprisingly well. Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, for instance, or (obviously) William Gibson's trilogy commencing with *Neuromancer*.

Recently I conducted an experiment. *Interzone*'s editor, David Pringle, suggested that I might be interested in guest-editing one issue of this magazine. I was delighted by this offer and decided that I would do a theme issue focusing on the impact of technology on human beings within the next 20 years. I started actively soliciting stories on this theme.

I wasn't sure how much of a response I would get, partly because *Interzone* is considered a relatively obscure publication in the United States (where I live) and partly because I had been partially convinced that science fiction is, in a sense dead. But I have found there is no shortage of strong, interesting material,

intimately relevant to our times. There are people who want to write it, and I believe there is a reasonably large number of people who want to read it. (We'll find out for sure when the April 1995 issue of *Interzone* is published, containing the stories that I have chosen.)

**N**ow let me end on a small note of hope. After the seven-million-dollar auction took place, sanity was restored at least partially when the Hearst Corporation (which owns Morrow, the publisher that made the winning bid) released a somewhat apologetic and highly embarrassed statement explaining that the editor who had offered to do so, consequently, the auction had to be held a second time. And this time around, the bidding stopped at one million dollars.

Of course, a million is still a huge sum. But it's seven times more rational than the amount which had been bid a few weeks previously, and in years to come, as the CD-ROM fever gradually abates, publishers may grow more rational still.

In the meantime, down here in the basement-world of *Interzone*, I have a bunch of stories which are exactly the kind of science fiction that I think is relevant and important. And somehow, this matters a lot more to me than the lurching-like buying frenzies of an industry which seems increasingly out of touch with its readership.

Charles Platt

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'It was a peaceful night. I went to bed and was awakened by the roar of the wind the crash of the breakers. When it was light I went down to see how it [the machine] had fared and found it scattered about a field.'

Bill Frost. *Western Mail*, 1932

#### I. THE STORM

The street door opened and the rattle of the wind almost drowned out his mother's voice.

'Jimmy!'

Jimmy Griffiths was lounging on his bed upstairs, reading his London pamphlets. The draught, piercing the ill-fitting window frames, was making his lamp flame flicker. 'What?'

'It's Bill Frost, here to see you.'

'Bill Frost?' Jimmy pushed his face closer to the murky type of the pamphlets. 'Mother, if he's trying to get me back into his choir again, tell him I'm not interested.'

'It's not the choir, Jimmy' his mother said uncertainly. 'You'd better come down.'

With an elaborate sigh, Jimmy threw his pamphlets down on the crumpled blanket.

Downstairs his mother stood before the open door her

small, nervous hands buried in her apron. The door from the street opened straight into the parlour, and the wind was intruding into the room like some invisible animal rattling the brasses on the range, clattering the framed prints from the Graphic in their neat rows on the walls, and scattering September leaves across the polished floor tiles. And the doorway framed the unprepossessing figure of Bill Frost, thin-faced, his lined mouth hidden by a tired moustache, a drab tie knotted tight up against his throat.

'Bill says he couldn't think where else to go,' his mother said.

Bill's eyes were shadowed, like hollows in a log. Despite himself Jimmy's heart moved. 'Is somebody ill?'

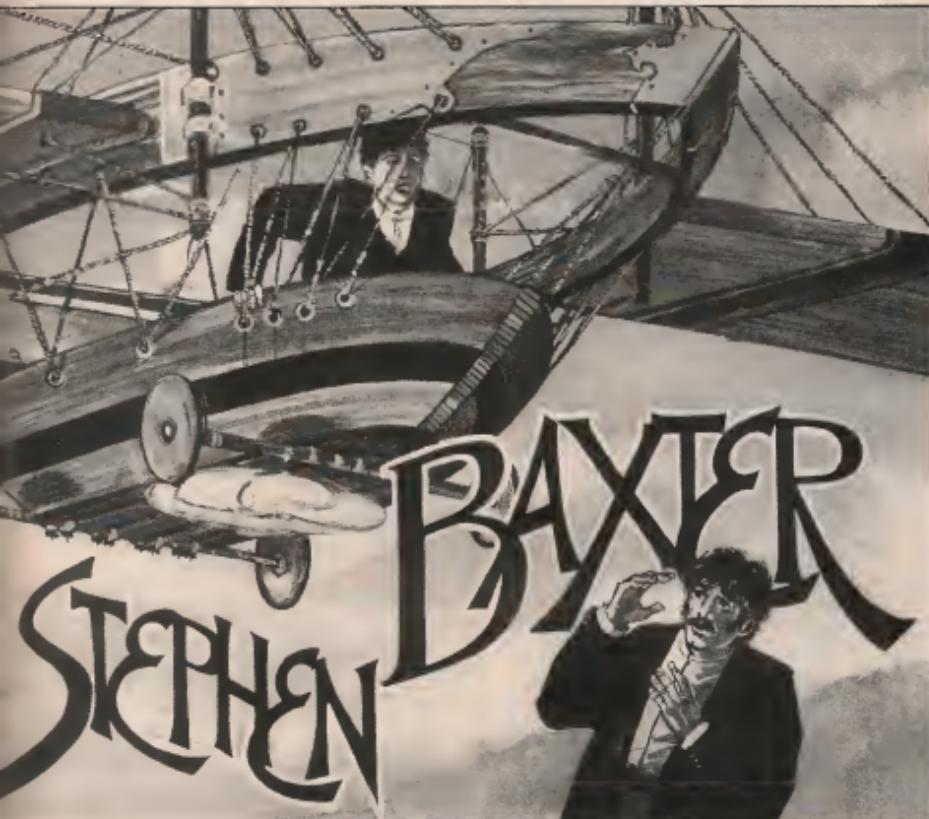
Bill Frost mumbled something, dropping his eyes.

'Bill wants your help' his mother said.

'Help with what?'

'With his machine' Her grey eyes seemed to be begging him to go along with Bill, out into the storm. *And whig?* – just to avoid a little social awkwardness, no doubt.

Jimmy looked from one to other, a slow, familiar impatience burning in him. Bill Frost was 47 years old: a deacon at the chapel, the founder of the local choir, a sound carpenter



and a good neighbour to his parents, he knew. And yet here he was, so suppressed by his own provincial awkwardness that he couldn't even speak for himself. In God's name, this is 1895. In London, things are on the move. A new century is nearly on us, blood is rising. You wouldn't think so, here on the coast of Goforsaiken Powbrokeshire!

"What bloody machine?" Jimmy snapped. Frost mumbled again, looking down at his cap. "What?"

He said, his mother replied with dogged determination, "this flying machine."

Bill Frost's cottage was a quarter-mile further up St Bude's Hill from the Griffiths's.

Bill marched stiffly up the path, his anxiety obvious in every movement of his angular body. Buffeted by the air Jimmy pulled his cap down over his ears and followed.

It was eleven o'clock. There was a quarter-moon, its face crossed by scudding clouds. The trees around Jimmy were huge and invisible and moving in the dark winds like ancient giants. Behind him, the Hill swept down to Saundersfoot Bay, and from the harbour rose the anxious tolling of a colliery

boat bell, the sustained crash of breakers.

After a hundred yards or so Bill turned off the path making towards Fred Watkins's farm. "So," Jimmy shouted across the wind, "what about this machine of yours, Bill?"

Bill turned his narrow head. "It crashed. The wheels caught in the top branches of a tree. You know, that big ash at the bottom of Fred Watkins's field -"

"What caught in the ash tree?"

"The wheels. The machine's wheels."

Jimmy shivered. He pulled his jacket close around his chest. Unexpectedly he felt a little scared. *Wheels in a tree? Flying machines?* What kind of closeted lunacy was he walking into?

Bill went on, "I thought I'd be safe to leave the machine in the field until the morning, but then this wretched wind came up, see?"

Jimmy tried to laugh. "But it's not actually a flying machine I mean you haven't made a machine that can really fly. Have you, Bill?"

Bill turned his face into the wind. "Not if it can't clear a bloody ash tree, I haven't."

They reached Fred Watkins's field. This was wasteland really dorm just weeds and trash. But there was something here. Jimmy saw some kind of machinery - wreckage - scattered over the grass. Silver moonlight glinted from polished, finely-shaped wood, all over the field.

Bill knelt beside one of the larger pieces of wreckage. It was shaped like a small boat, with flaps of wood - hinged somehow - protruding from the sides. "Thank God, he said fervently. His words snatched away by the wind. "We're not too late. I thought the storm might have smashed it all up by now, see."

Jimmy walked further into the field. There was one other large piece of wreckage: another boat-shape, smaller than the first. Lengths of cable lay scattered across the grass. It looked as if the two boats had been strung together, somehow, by the bits of cable. In the wind, the smaller boat had scraped across the grass, leaving a trail of crushed blades.

Close up, Jimmy saw that the device did indeed have wheels: simple iron-rimmed wooden discs fixed to a trolley of crude axles under the smaller boat. And - he bent to see there were twigs and leaves wrapped around the wheels.

Twigs and leaves, from an ash tree.

"Come on," Bill said. He got to his feet, brisk and nervous. "Help me lift it up to the house. If we cover it all with tarpaulin, it should be all right for the night."

He took hold of one end of the larger boat, the one with the protruding side-flaps. Jimmy took the other end, and they hefted the device off the ground. It was surprisingly light, and Jimmy staggered.

"You go backwards," Bill shouted to him. "I'll guide you. Careful, now."

Jimmy, blinded by the rushing air, stumbled awkwardly across the uneven ground.

They reached Frost's cottage, clean anthracite smoke rose from its chimney to be whipped away by the turbulent air.

Jimmy, tripping over a step, allowed the boat to scrape against the side of the house. A side-flap hit the wall, and Jimmy heard the crackle of splintering wood.

Bill Frost cried out, as if in pain. "Bloody hell, boy, have a care!"

Jimmy felt as shocked by Bill's swearing as by his own near fall. "It's only one of those flaps, Bill."

"Flaps? Damn it, that's a bloody wing, boy. Now, be careful what you're about."

When he got home, Jimmy took a cup of tea up to bed, and returned to his pamphlets.

At around one he heard the door open again, admitting from the storm his father and older brother, George. The two men were working shifts at the local colliery, Bonville's Court. In their shabby jackets and crumpled trousers, they would be wet, cold and weary, having been carried home along the coast rail line by the open coal drams, and now Jimmy heard the weary clatter of their boots as they prepared for their baths.

Jimmy pored over his political pamphlets, drinking in the scent of their cheap ink, trying to escape in spirit from all this grinding poverty, and soul-breaking work, and provincialism.

His father thought he was a *radical*, he knew, strolling about when real men were at their work, down the pits. But it wasn't Jimmy's fault that he, of all of them, was the only one to have the spirit and brains to escape the mines - wasn't his fault, even, that he was 'so bloody fitly,' as his father had ended

lessly drummed into him. He never had fit into this family.

But if truth be told, his new job in London, as a publisher's clerk, was no great joy. And - though he would never, ever admit as much - he knew he didn't really fit in there either. In London, his Welshness stuck out like a sign pasted to his head, he thought gloomily. But still, there in London he was in the *centre* of things, surrounded by the pulsing, evolving soul of the new age. He had literature from all the major centres of radical London thought: the Social Democratic Federation, Morris's Socialist League, the Fabian Society, and even one thin sheet from the Independent Labour Party. Beyond the cottages' study walls the wind still swirled, like - he thought sleepily - London's eternal storm of information and debate. Jimmy was 19 years old, and his mind and heart were wide open to that intellectual tempest. He could hardly bear to return, even for a visit like this, to the restricted cage of Pembrokeshire, for him, Saundersfoot was the past, and London the promise of the bright new century.

He doffed his lamp and snuggled under his sheets, it was best to be asleep before his brother came up to their shared room. Jimmy had taken leave from work, and he'd told his mother he would visit for another few days. He could always pack his bags and clear off first thing in the morning, and get back to the quick, exciting air of London.

But, as he waited for sleep to claim him, he couldn't stop thinking of poor old Bill Frost. A flying machine in Saundersfoot? What had the chap been thinking of?

It was all nonsense, of course. But he remembered, with vague unease, those ash twigs in the machine's wheels.

## II. MORNING

At a little after eight o'clock, Jimmy pulled on his jacket and cap and stepped out of the cottage. The storm had blown itself out. The sunlit air was crisp, invigorating, poised between summer's richness and the ice of winter.

Jimmy looked down the wooded limbs of St Bride's Hill, to where Saundersfoot hugged its crescent of beach, the sharp white crests of waves glittered on the wrinkled ocean. The view made for an exhilarating sweep, and for a moment Jimmy imagined himself to be Bill Frost, to be leaving the ground, here halfway up the Hill, like some heavy, cloth-feathered bird, he would rise into the air, heading down the Hill and into the breeze, off like billy-ho towards the Bay. For an instant the vision was so real Jimmy felt as if his feet, light and airy, were indeed lifting from the mundane grass like a buckuboo, a dragon.

He smiled at himself. The vision passed, and he set off up the Hill path.

He found Bill working in his garden, in shirtsleeves, braces and cap; he had a pipe jammed in the corner of his small mouth, and he wore his tie neatly knotted up to his throat. Behind Bill, the garden - a neat, unimaginative square of lawn - sloped down the hillside.

"Hello, Bill. I wanted to see if you were all right." Bill greeted him with a handshake. His grip was firm, confident, the palm heavily calloused. "I'm glad you came up," Bill said in his soft, melodic voice. "Thanks for coming out last night. I know you must have thought I'd gone a bit daft."

"It was nothing, Bill. I -"

"No, I mean it." An intensity shone out of Bill's blue eyes now, burning through his shyness. Jimmy, jolted, realized that Bill meant every word with a passion, and there wouldn't be many occasions in his life when Jimmy would be the recip-

rient of such gratitude 'If you hadn't helped, that wind would have smashed up my machine, and that would have been that.'

Jimmy, embarrassed, tried not to laugh. 'You could have built another.'

'No, I couldn't afford the materials.' He leaned closer to Jimmy conspiratorially. 'Anyway, it's Edna, you see. She thinks all this business of flying about is a bit daffy. Particularly after that letter from the War Office. Still, it was good of her to get Fred Watkins to let me use his field. Edna's a Watkins herself, you know.' He straightened up, the morning sunlight catching his shock of grey hair. As it turned out, thanks to you the machine is almost intact. There's only that one wing really, that took a bit of a knock, and the cabling wants fixing, of course. Do you want to come and have a look at it? It's just round here.'

Bill wiped his hands on a cloth, and led Jimmy around the corner of the house. And there – close to a small potting shed, in the shadow of straggling raspberry canes – stood the flying machine.

The whole thing was suspended off the ground, on crude wooden trestles. The two boat-like devices Jimmy remembered from last night were arranged one atop the other, their prows pointing in parallel down the hill. Bill pointed out the machine's components to Jimmy. The *cradle* – the smaller wheeled boat – was at the bottom, near the ground, with the *gondola* – the larger section, with its 'wings' of wood, one smashed – suspended above. Wood gleamed, shaped, planed and polished, the whole thing looked like some elaborate piece of furniture. Jimmy thought.

Bill stepped forward and climbed easily into the cradle, ducking his head to avoid the wings. He smiled at Jimmy around his pipe, his face a little flushed. This is how I stood last night, you see, Jimmy. Of course I've got to replace all the cables yet, but you can imagine how it looked, can't you? The wind off the sea felt just right, and it's the wind that lifts up the machine, you see.'

'The *wind*?' Jimmy looked up at the wings uncertainly. The machine seemed so *real* – solid and finished – here in the autumn sunlight. Jimmy dug deep into his soul, searching for a little scepticism. 'What do you do, flap those wooden wings and take off like a bird?'

'Of course not. I told you, it's the *wind* you need. See those tanks up there?'

Jimmy leaned forward and peered up through the gondola's open base, to see a series of cylindrical tanks fixed inside the framework.

'*Hydrogen*.' Bill said softly. 'Just to get me off the ground. Of course I have to pedal a bit too.'

'Pedal?'

'And when I'm up, I tilt the wings forward and tip into the wind.' He made a swooping motion through the air with his broad hand. 'And off I go like billy-ho, just like a seagull, eh?' He sighed. 'And if it hadn't been for Fred Watkins's bloody ash tree I'd have made it clear across the Bay to Stepaside. I tell you.'

Jimmy became aware of his mouth gaping open, as he stared at Bill Frost inside the remains of his flying machine. He had no idea what to say.

Bill eyed him, some of his shyness returning. 'You're interested in all this, aren't you, Jimmy?'

'Interested? Ah –'

Bill squinted up at the snapped wing. 'I'll spend some



time on her this evening, before the light goes. There's just that wing to fix, and load up the tanks again, and fix those cables... She'll be ready for another shot by the weekend, probably. You know, with just another couple of feet - if I'd been a few years younger and a bit less tizzicky - I would have been over that bloody ash tree. Well. What do you say?"

Jimmy felt disconcerted. "What do you mean?"

Again, that painful shyness seemed to descend on Bill, and the carpenter averted his eyes. "Jimmy, would you like to give me a hand?"

### III. THE PATENT

So for the next few evenings, after Bill got back from his employment up at the colliery-owners' folly, Hean Castle, Jimmy worked on the flying machine.

Slowly the machine took shape once more, as Bill laced the cradle and gondola together with his lengths of cable. Jimmy grew fascinated by the machine itself, by the craftsmanship in it, as if it were some kind of sculpture. The surfaces, lovingly fashioned by Frost's strong hands, were polished so deep that the light off the sea seemed to sink into the curved wood; the joints and pegs were as finely worked as if it were a bit of Chippendale. Whether it flew or not, the machine was certainly a bloody beautiful piece of work, Jimmy thought.

Jimmy saw slowly that the machine - or, more fundamentally, the idea of flying - was a fixed compass-point in Bill's thoughts. But it wasn't an obsession. Bill was a chapel elder, and he took one evening a week off from his machine to coach his male-voice choir.

No, he wasn't obsessed, or mad. Bill Frost simply wanted to fly.

"Why, Bill?"

Bill Frost straightened up from the gondola, kneading the muscles at the base of his spine, the coals of his pipe glowed. "Why what?"

"Why fly?"

With one hand resting against the flank of his machine, Bill looked across the fold of the Bay, to the north. "Well, I'll tell you, then," he said. "It was many years ago I was quite a young lad still, but already in the trade I was working up at Hean then too, as it happens.

"I'd just cut a plank of pine, and I was carrying it, see, across the front of Hean. Suddenly there was a wind - a gust, really, straight up off the Bay. Well, it picked up that plank, with me clinging to it, and lifted us both straight up into the air. I swear by five or six feet or more. And then it let me down, as gentle as you like."

He turned to Jimmy, his eyes deepened by the gloom. "So there you are. I've flown once already, you see. And it was such a bloody marvellous feeling, I said to myself, 'Why, I want to do that again!'" He slapped the solid flank of his machine. "And that's what this is all about."

Jimmy shook his head. "But, Bill, you don't know anything about flying. You don't have any scientific education."

"Neither did that plank, I reckon," Bill said. "And neither do the seagulls that wheel around the Bay. You don't need science to fly. All you need is a wind to lift you, and a way to catch the wind. And I knew I had the hands, the craft to do it." He smiled. "So this machine is part seagull, and part furniture, you see. Just like me, I suppose."

"Anyway," he said, "I'm as scientific as you like. I've

got a Patent, you know."

"You're joking."

Bill looked shocked. "Never. And there's my letter from the War Office. Do you want to see?"

It was a real Patent, all right. Number 20,431, dated October 23rd, 1894. In the fading light, Jimmy read out the certificate: "A FLYING MACHINE. William Frost, Carpenter and Builder, Saundersfoot, Pembrokeshire, do hereby declare the nature of this invention to be as follows..."

"I filed it as soon as I had the design," Bill said. "The thing itself wasn't even half-built back then."

"And the War Office?"

"Well, I sent the Patent there. I thought the Secretary of State might make something out of it."

Bill produced his War Office letter. It was from an Under Secretary, Mr St John Brodrick. Bill was thanked, but, Jimmy read out, "This nation does not intend to adopt aerial navigation as a means of warfare."

Jimmy shook his head, he felt a bubble of humour rise inside him, but he was unsure whether he was laughing at Frost, or Brodrick, or himself. "Bloody English! He had no *arrant*, no right, to speak to you like that, Bill." Of course the English would dismiss a Patent for a flying machine, coming from some unknown mining village in Wales. But there seemed to be real pain etched in Bill's face as he looked over his letter from Mr St John Brodrick. Suddenly Jimmy felt his mockery of Bill melt away, and resentment at the dismissal of Bill's life work by this London functionary merged with his own uneasy sense of displacement.

He laid a hand on Bill's shoulder. "Never mind, Bill," he said. "Another couple of days and your machine will be winging it around the Bay with the seagulls, just as you say. That will show them."

*And what, an inner voice warned, will you say to this old fool when the bloody thing won't even leave the ground?*

Bill turned to him, his pipe discarded. "Yes," he said evenly. "This time, it's going to fly with no mistake."

"Of course you will. And..."

"No," Bill said sharply. "Not me. I've been thinking. I'm a bit of a *roker* now, see, Jimmy. I'm worn out. My legs and lungs just aren't what they were 20 years ago. And I get tizzicky with my chest in the winter. No, I can't do it. I'll just end up in the ash tree again."

"I don't understand," Jimmy said slowly.

"You're going to have to fly the machine for me, Jimmy Griffiths."

### IV. THE FURNITURE SEAGULL

It was a fine morning, a late September Saturday.

In the middle of Fred Watkins's field, Jimmy Griffiths stood in the lower cradle of the restored flying machine, his feet resting on the two pedals set in the base. He was taller than Bill Frost, and his head kept bumping against the walls of the upper, winged gondola. The two table-leaf wings were tilted upwards on their hinges, folded neatly away against the gondola's gleaming flanks. Rubber pipes snaked up from Bill's home-made feeder tanks into the cylinders of hydrogen gas fixed inside the gondola.

The cradle rested on its wheels - now freed of ash twigs - and the upper gondola was supported by its trestles, transported from Bill Frost's garden. Bill and George, Jimmy's brother, stood to either side of the trestles, steadying the

gondola

Now the breeze picked up. The machine creaked a little, a deep wooden sound, and there was a smell of wood chippings and polish. The breeze was coming off the sea and straight up St Bride's Hill, looking down over the Hill now, Jimmy could see gulls floating effortlessly over an ocean of crumpled silk.

Jimmy wondered what he was doing here.

Of course he didn't believe that Bill's machine was actually going to work today and many times in the last few days he had come to regret his sentimental impulse to waste so much time with the carpenter. It had all been a bit of a lark, he supposed.

But now it came to it, he found he didn't have the heart to walk away from Bill and his foolishness – not without trying.

Then the machine strained again, as if yearning to be free of this imprisoning ground.

And what if it's true? What if I really *am* going to fly, today? He remembered his odd, momentary vision of flying, that first morning looking down over the Hill. Wouldn't it be glorious, though? He felt a tiny window of doubt open up in his heart, and a small part of him began to wonder – in hope, for Bill's sake – if this bit of furniture really was, impossibly, going to leave the ground.

You must be bloody tapped, Jimmy Griffiths,' George murmured sourly.

Jimmy looked down at his brother, beside the trestle. George's expression was full of its usual vicious humour, and Jimmy felt immediately absurd.

'If it's so mad, why are you here then?' he said defiantly.

'To watch you make an idiot of yourself, of course.' George sniffed. 'And to carry you home when you bust your bloody leg. Father always said you were a *flot*, Jimmy.'

'Flighty, eh?' Jimmy snapped back. 'Well, maybe you're going to be right for once, George.'

But George's stolid face – round, coal-streaked under its battered cap – was like a dark, Earth-bound moon, its sour gravity holding Jimmy forever to the ground. Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if, just for once, George could be proved spectacularly finally wrong?

Then, as if in response to Jimmy's silent plea, the machine shuddered in the breeze. Jimmy rattled in the cradle and had to grip its polished rim.

And – unexpectedly, alarmingly – there was a surge, faint and weak, upwards, so delicate Jimmy wasn't sure if he was imagining it, so even it was like being a child again, swept up by his father's arms.

George stumbled forward, suddenly dragged by the machine across the grass. 'Bloody hell,' he said, his mouth a round pit in his face.

'What?'

'You've lifted off the trestles, man.' George staggered, his arms straining at the cradle. 'I don't believe it. You're in the bloody air, Jimmy.'

'Pedal, Jim!' Bill Frost's tie knot had slipped a few degrees around his neck. He pulled free the gas feeder lines, and Jimmy heard valves close with a snap, then Bill staggered away from the machine. 'You're up! Pedal, man!'

Jimmy gripped the walls of the cradle and pushed at the two paddle-shaped foot-pedals beneath him. The pedals worked wide creaking fans of shaped wood. The pedals took a bit of effort to get moving, but once the fans were spinning pushing air down in a wash towards the ground – it got a lot



easier, no harder than riding a heavy bicycle

The machine lurched sideways, to Jimmy's left. His feet slipped off the pedals and he almost fell over the wall of the cradle, its hard rim dug into his ribs through his jacket

'Let go!' Bill screamed at George. 'You're pulling him over! Let go!'

George Jimmy realized, was still hanging onto the side of the cradle, his arms upstretched, his knuckles white. Now George opened his fists and staggered backwards from the machine

Released, the machine tipped violently the other way, and the cables between cradle and gondola hummed and creaked. For a few seconds Jimmy could do no more than cling on as the cradle bobbed in the air like a cork on water.

Then, at last, the machine steadied, leaving the cradle twisting from side to side in its nest of cables.

'Pedal, Jimmy! Keep pedalling!' Bill called.

Jimmy pushed at his pedals, and once more the fans creaked into motion. He glanced down. The bottom of the cradle was open, and – through the cradle's open structure, beyond his trouser legs and muddied shoes – he could see a square of sunlit grass, a square which *slid away beneath him*.

He was in the air!

Still pedalling, he peered over the side. It was as if he stood at the top of an invisible staircase, looking down at George. Jimmy felt a surge of triumph. George's dark disc of a face, turned up towards the machine, looked like a doll's face, scoured of all its scepticism, devoid at last of its lifelong ability to tether Jimmy to the ground.

'You're not flying yet, Jimmy Griffiths.' Bill Frost's voice floating up from the ground, was like a reedy tenor emerging from some invisible choir. 'You've not got enough height. Keep pedalling, boy!'

So Jimmy pedalled, the sweat pooling around his collar. The machine, with its rotating fans and gas cylinders, lifted him easily upwards. And now Jimmy was so high that he could see the whole of Fred Watkins's field in one glance, spread out like a green handkerchief beneath him. Bill and George, and the machine's empty trestles and Bill's bags of tools, were no more than a little cluster in the receding grass, like an abandoned nest.

Suddenly the breeze picked up, bumping against the machine. The wind seemed stiffer up here away from the grass, and suddenly the machine felt like a fragile thing, indeed bobbing like a thistledown in the air. Jimmy had a rushing vision of the machine as he'd first seen it, smashed and strewn across Fred Watkins's field. Somehow he hadn't considered the possibility of *falling* before, now, though he thought about it with a vengeance. What if the machine was to tumble out of the air again, now, with him in it?

'The wings, Jimmy!' Bill Frost had cupped toy hands around his tiny mouth, his voice floated up out of the huge landscape. 'You're high enough. Pull the lever!'

The lever. The lever was a length of wood before his face. In a panic, Jimmy pulled at it, hard.

The wings of wood spread out over his head, dropping on their creaking hinges away from the sides of the gondola.

'Now tilt! Tilt them down!'

Jimmy pulled at the lever again and the wings, stiffly, tipped downwards, pointing their polished leading edges towards the ground.

The machine fell, so suddenly that Jimmy felt his stomach lurch... But he wasn't falling downwards, he realized he was

falling across the air, gliding down like a seagull towards the ground.

Bill Frost was shouting again, but Jimmy remembered what to do. He shoved at his lever, making the wings tilt upwards. They shuddered as they caught at the air, and the cradle twisted in its cables. But the machine rose again, and the air pushed at his face.

The ash tree at the bottom of Watkins's field sailed beneath him, its crown passing safely beneath the cradle's wheels.

'Well?' Jimmy breathed. 'What do you think of this, then? George? I'm bloody flying after all.'

He worked at his lever, and the flying machine dipped and soared in the air just like a stiff furniture seagull. It was utterly quiet up here, as if he were suspended in some bubble of glass, isolated with only his own ragged breathing, the creak of the wings, the singing of the breeze in the cables.

He rose fifty, a hundred feet, and St Bride's Hill unfolded beneath him like a curving breast. Glancing down, he could see George and Bill scrambling over the Hill after him, small and unimportant, evoking a sharp boyhood memory of wooden soldiers tumbling down a counterpane.

Saundersfoot Bay spread itself beneath him. From up here the shape of the land was clear. He could see the Bay's crescent of captured sea, with the harbour structures like shadows on the palm of the land's cupping hand. The folded landscape itself seemed complex and dynamic – as if he were looking down at a photograph, a frozen slice out of the life of some immense ancient organism. Once – he'd read in London – all of Pembrokeshire had been an ocean floor. But time and ice had compressed that old ocean into strata, into layers of rock that had at last twisted up and come bursting through the grass and sand like splintered bone, hard and defiant. And from up here, he saw how all of human history was compressed into thin layers too, overlying the geology. Here the old tribes had walked, the Cambriae, the Ordovices, the Silures, tribes who had bequeathed their names to the geological layers into which later men had split time.

How apt it was, he thought wildly, that he had launched into the air from St Bride's Hill! For St Bride was no more than a Christianized memory of Brigantia, the oldest of the Saxon goddesses, Brigantia, goddess of the Earth, and spring, and light. Under a thin patina of Christianity, Brigantia was still here, with all her Neolithic grandmothers: he could feel it up here, her ancient green soul soaked into the timesculpted, layered landscape.

He laughed out loud, and the air-bubble around him contained his voice, making it loud in his ears. By leaving the ground he had become something immortal, he thought, an angel of Brigantia.

He lay on the cool grass, laughing, staring up at the clouds and feeling the Earth rotate under him, as light as a thistle-down itself.

The faces of Bill and George loomed over him, two moons, round with wonder, eclipsing the Sun. Jimmy saw envy and pride mixing in Bill's watery gaze.

'How was it, Jimmy? How was it?'

'It was marvellous, Bill,' he said. 'Bloody marvellous. But I can't tell you. You'll have to try it for yourself, tizzicky chest or not. He was seized by a sudden passion, an echo of his

rediscovery of Brigantia 'And that ought to show those English with their letters and their War Office. Get Mr St John bloody Brodrick to come out here, and stand where you stood, and watch me flying like a seagull and then tell him to write his letters eh?'

Bill looked reflective. 'They'll never do that, Jimmy,' he said gently. 'You know the English think we're all tapped, the whole lot of us this side of the Severn.' He stroked the flank of his flying machine. 'Flying is what this is about. That's all.'

'It's not all, damn it,' Jimmy said. He got to his feet, he felt infused by vigour, by a strength pulsing out of the ancient, sculpted land from which he had flown. 'If the bloody English won't come to us, then let's go to them,' he shouted. 'Let's take our flying machines and soar over their heads, blocking out the Sun! What do you say, Bill? George?'

Bill seemed to shy away within himself, suddenly every bit the humble local carpenter, the timid church elder.

But George was grinning.

#### V. THE ANGELS OF BRIGANTIA

The third Marquess of Salisbury, Prime Minister of Great Britain, was a man of regular habits (so Jimmy Griffiths learned from his circle of scurrilous friends in London). Each day Salisbury hurried through the London traffic to catch his seven o'clock train from King's Cross, up to his residence at Hatfield.

Thus, one Friday in the late spring of 1896, Lord Salisbury, in his greatcoat, came down the stairs of the Foreign Office at a little after half past six of the evening. A messenger threw open the door of a single-horsed brougham, and as soon as the Prime Minister was on board, the trained horse started at full speed. And off went the brougham under the Horse Guards Arch, along Whitehall and towards Trafalgar Square and the bustle of Charing Cross Road.

But today was different.

Londoners – clerks and shop assistants and drapers, hurrying for their trains and omnibuses home from work paused on Westminster and Lambeth Bridges, to peer past the ornate walls of Parliament at the odd events taking place in the river.

From a Welsh coal ketch called the *Verluna*, stationed close to Lambeth Bridge, a box of wood rose awkwardly into the air. To the watchers on the Bridges, the object looked like a piece of furniture, unusually propelled upwards. But then quite unexpectedly – the box sprouted wings, and it dipped towards the water and up again, in the manner of a bird.

It was a *flying machine*, and it carried – people saw, pointing – a man a dour-looking, thin-faced fellow in a cap.

And now up from the ketch there rose another machine and another, and a fourth. Soon the four furniture seagulls were wheeling over the Thames, and their occupants called out to each other in a lifting accent.

The machines formed up into a rough diamond shape, like a flock of wooden geese. And off they soared over Parliament, past Westminster Bridge, and along Whitehall, dipping and swooping.

Jimmy Griffiths took the lead, with, at his shoulder, his brother George. Behind them flew Teddy Poole, a cockle-picker from Monkstone, and Harold Read, son of a shipbuilder and a power in the Stepside rugby team.

The heart of London was laid out below Jimmy like a glittering map. The traffic was snarling up, he saw as the drivers

and passengers, of broughams and phaetons and omnibuses, stopped to stare at the crowded sky. There were a hundred, a thousand faces turned up at him like coins, lit with wonder, once again. Jimmy felt the awesome power of flight pulsing through his soul.

And there – nearing the top of Whitehall and quite distinctive – was Salisbury's brougham.

He shouted to the others and pointed down. Teddy Poole waved and called back, his voice carrying small and perfect across the upper air. 'Good shooting, boys!'

The four machines circled like kestrels over the brougham. From a bag at his waist Jimmy pulled out a lump of coal, good Saundersfoot anthracite, glassy and hard: the best coal in the bloody world.

He hurled the lump down at the brougham.

The coal missed the brougham by a dozen feet, so he reached into his bag to haul out another. Soon the anthracite was spattering down onto the road like a dark rain. It was difficult to aim, but Jimmy had the satisfaction of seeing a couple of his shots, at least, clatter against the brougham's polished top. And Teddy Poole, with a whoop, laid one shot slap on the horse's exposed thigh, the poor beast whinnied and lurched forward, rattling the brougham like a shoebox.

When his coal was exhausted, Jimmy hauled at his lever and wheeled for one last time over the brougham. He yelled down at the Prime Minister, as loud as he could. 'This nation does not intend to adopt aerial navigation as a means of warfare!'

Then laughing, he led his angels of Brigantia away, towards the open spaces of St James's Park.

#### VI. CAPPER'S FLYERS

'Ah, but do you remember that day?' Bill asked.

Jimmy smiled, and lifted his face to the afternoon sun. The Frost's two goats, tethered at the bottom of Bill's famous garden, nibbled at the grass. The growling noise of Stanley Scourfield's delivery van floated up from the bottom of St Bride's Hill. Jimmy knew it was the butchers, because that was still the only van in Saundersfoot.

'Yes, Yes, I do. It was bloody marvellous, Bill.'

'Now, you know I'm not a cruel man, Jimmy. But I'd have given a great deal to see the face of that old ass Lord Salisbury as Welsh coal came hurtling out of the sky all around him.' Bill Frost wiped tears from his weakening eyes. Sixty-three years old now, he was still more gaunt and grey than ever. Jimmy saw how the cuffs of Bill's suit were threadbare and patched. Well, Bill had never been flush with money – and he still wasn't, it seemed, despite the success of his invention. 'You don't come home much these days, Jimmy.'

'Well, I've my job in London.'

'Still working on the newspapers?'

'I'm a deputy editor now.' Suddenly Jimmy was aware of how flat – how English – he had let his accent become, with time. He pressed on. 'And I've got a family, a wife and a daughter, half grown she is. We live in Ealing, which is –'

'And what about your family here?'

Jimmy sat back in his chair, and looked out over the expanse of St Bride's Hill, down towards the Bay. 'Well, we've taken in Vickerman's pit ponies to let them graze our garden. This strike's hitting us hard, Bill.'

'It's hurting a lot of folk around here.'

The coal field strike had started a year earlier – in 1910 – when a band of miners at Tonypandy, in the Rhondda, had

got themselves locked out after haggling over a price list. Now, 30,000 men were locked out or on strike right across South Wales. There had been a lot of trouble – even in sleepy places like Saundersfoot – what with the owners' attempts to bring in blacklegs. The police and troops had been kept busy, and there was even an Army general put in charge of keeping order in the area – 'as if we were all a bunch of bloody Boer farmers,' as Jimmy's father had complained.

'It's hard for George,' Jimmy said. 'He spends his days digging coal off the beach with his mates. George can't put up with this, with idleness. Well you know George. He never was the most reflective man in the world.'

He heard a *thrumming* noise, a soft pulsing that rose from over the crest of the Hill behind them. Jimmy glanced at Bill, the old carpenter merely lifted his face to the light.

Jimmy stood up and walked down the slope to the middle of the garden, and looked back towards the crest of the Hill.

A dozen Army Flyers came soaring over St Bride's Hill towards the Bay, a hundred feet in the air, their polished wings tilting smoothly into the light wind. The large, petrol-driven fans set in the Flyers' bases shushed easily through the air.

From the leading Flyer, a soldier's goggled face returned Jimmy's stare, expressionless.

'There must be trouble in Saundersfoot again,' Bill Frost said.

Jimmy shielded his eyes and squinted up at the machines. 'Those are Capper Flyers,' he said. 'Model E, I think.' Each powerful enough to carry two English soldiers, refined versions of Capper's first fighting craft, themselves a major advance over Bill's prototype design – machines which had swept over the Transvaal in 1899, winning the war against the Boer republics in a matter of months. And now the Flyers car-

ried English soldiers – like khaki-clad angels with guns mounted in their Flyers' cradles – to subdue Saundersfoot's der hungry Welsh miners that rabble of 'undeserving poor,' as even Jimmy's own paper called them.

Jimmy remembered his excitement – his radical, intellectual rage – at the age of 19, at the turn of the century, when he'd first left home for London. But it was gone now, all gone. Jimmy was still only 35 – younger than Bill Frost had been in the days of their great adventure, he realised – but those moments of flight, when he had soared like a gull, seemed long ago. Now the years, and his responsibilities, had finally bound him to the Earth for ever.

And the 20th century didn't seem so bloody wonderful, now he was in it.

Jimmy walked up the garden slowly. He sat down with Bill Frost. 'Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't come out to help you, that stormy night. There might be no flying machines yet, eh? And would we be better off, I wonder? But I suppose you should still be proud, Bill. Without you.'

But Bill had closed his eyes and seemed to have drifted to sleep, perhaps dreaming. Jimmy wondered of that distant day at Hean Castle when a gust of wind had swept up a pine plank and a frightened, astonished, astonished young carpenter.

Behind him the Capper Flyers swept steadily down St Bride's Hill towards the lights of Saundersfoot.

**Stephen Baxter** writes with Brian Stableford for the title of most prolific science fiction author, with nearly 20 stories in these pages over the past eight years, including a two-parter 'The Baryonic Lords' in issues 49-50. His forthcoming sixth novel, *Timeships* (HarperCollins April 1993), is a centenary sequel to H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. He lives in Prestwood, Bucks.

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# CULTS OF UNREASON

**David V. Barrett**, one time editor of the sf anthology *Digital Dreams*, has unconsciously denied any connection with the first adult magazine for CD-ROM users (complete with a CD of computer porn) titled *Digital Dreams*

**Robert Bloch** died on 23rd September 1994 aged 77—not unexpectedly his terminal illness was announced weeks earlier at the World SF Convention. I hardly need say how universally liked he was, let alone mention *Psycho*. His 1962 collection of fan pieces *The Eighth Stage of Fanlore* (recently reprinted) is still huge fun.

**Arthur C. Clarke** was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, partly it seems, on the ground that geosynchronous satellites have helped get world leaders talking to each other. Hi Pidel, this is Bill. He did not win.

**L. Ron Hubbard** continues to rampage unchecked. The 1994 American Booksellers Association (ABA) trash was preceded by a 10th anniversary Writers of the Future celebration held at the Scientology 'Celebrity Center' in Hollywood. St people were less than cheered by frequent mentions of Scientology during the very long awards ceremony still less the closing call for 'three cheers for L. Ron Hubbard: hip hip hooray!' The World SF Convention saw a lot of grumbling about the increasing visibility of Scientology in connection with the WotF contests.

**Jerry Pournelle**'s secret career in sports writing is revealed on the blurb page of *Poul Anderson's Harvest of Stars*, which identifies Pournelle as co-author of *Football*. I have yet to trace his collaborative venture about off-track betting. *The Totem in God's Eye*

**Carl Sagan** may safely be called a BHA or Butt-Head Astronomer: ruled Judge I. Baum of the US District Court for Central California as he threw out Sagan's libel suit against Apple (see past columns). 'One does not seriously attack the expertise of a scientist using the undefined phrase "butt-head".'

**Charles Stross**, rising author, might or might not have read the recent Judge Dredd spinoff novel featuring a minor character called Chuck Stross who wanders pathetically around the plot trying to show people his wads of print-out—but later gains Stature

**Karl Edward Wagner** died of liver failure on 15th October. He was only 48. Besides his own horror novels and stories, he is fondly remembered for editing *The Year's Best Horror* annually since 1980. This anthology series often drew on *Interview* and the British small press. Karl was highly sympathetic to 'borderline' work though he liked to pull such authors' legs by saying the story was too tame and that 'I added a final paragraph with zombies and chainsaws' since this was an obvious oversight on your part.'

**Janny Wurts** was disconcerted during her recent UK trip when, giving a reading of her work which had been carefully advertised as a reading of her work, she was interrupted by an audience member denouncing all readings as unhelpful, uninformative and a waste of time. *Interspace*'s very own Chris Gilmore had struck again!

**Jane Yolen** continues to be interestingly publicized: her novel *Binary Rose* was burned by anti-gay activists on the steps of the Kansas City Board of Education building. 'My first book burning. I am torn between being proud and being disgusted.'

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**New Horizons in Geography** From *Remembrance Day* by Brian Aldiss: 'She wore large bronze earrings made in an obscure country which rattled when she laughed.' A correspondent asks: 'Is it time for Aldiss to write another travel book?'

**British Fantasy Award**—the August Derleth Award for best fantasy novel was presented this year to Ramsey Campbell for *The Long Lost*; it must be getting time to change the name to the Ramsey Again Award.

**Hugo Footnote** As champagne corks popped for the *SF Encyclopedia*, John Clute also cheered Kim Stanley Robinson's *Green Mars* victory. 'The nerve of it: winning a Hugo for a book which the razor-sharp cutting edge gun on the Arthur C. Clarke Awards panel didn't even shortlist. This is a direct consequence of the taste, wit and judgement for which they have become so extremely thoroughly known. You can quote me.'

**Secrets of Prophecy** Pat Murphy asked at a Readercon panel what coming future developments sf writers have missed. 'Well we missed them.' At the same event Nancy Kress told of the most differently flattering invitation she'd ever received: to join the team for Robert Silverberg's *Murasaki* anthology (also featuring Anderson, Bear, Benford, Bova, Pohl). 'We have to have a woman, or we're going to get killed!'

**Give Me Liberty** The Prometheus Award for libertarian achievement by Troy weighed the novel of the year (L. Neil Smith's *Pallas*) wins half an ounce in gold, while owing to inflation a mighty all-time Hall of Fame award (Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*) rates only 0.1 oz. You can't take it with you.

**More Clarke Award Nominees** Help! I should never have started this, but out of fairness here are the rest of the submitted books—so far. HarperCollins: Brian Aldiss *Somewhere East of Life*; Hodder/TEL: Gene Wolfe *Lake of the Long Sun* and *Child of the Long Sun*; Millennium: Kristine Kathryn Rusch *Alice Influences*; Bruce Sterling, *Heavy*

# Ansible LINK



**David Langford**

Winkler Orbit David Garnett, *Stargazers*, Mary Gentle, *Left to His Own Devices*, Rachel Pollack, *Temporary Agency*. Pan: Paul Anderson, *Harvest of Stars*, Eric Brown, *Engineer*, Peter F. Hamilton, *A Question of Manner*. Bat erstwhile winner Pat Cadigan doesn't care any more. I've had Arthur C. Clarke, and he's almost good enough for me too. You dog.'

**Fairly Unique** It is to be hoped that Harlan Ellison never sees the *Guardian* obituary by Maxim Jakubowski stating that Robert Bloch 'will probably remain the only writer to have won prestigious awards across the spectrum of the sf, mystery, horror and fantasy fields.'

**Speaking of Newspapers**: several people quizzed me about my early-September *Guardian* sf reviews, whose creative subeditor had transposed the phrase 'Good fun nevertheless' from a review of Eric Brown's *Engineer* to that of Andrew Harman's *The Tunnels*, which emphatically was not good fun nevertheless. Christopher Priest topped this with a story of his similarly cramped column for the *Oxford Mail*—five books to be covered in 50 words each. When he begged a special dispensation to devote his entire space to one book, it was granted, after which frowning subeditors cut his single 250-word review to the permitted wordcount of 50...

**Ten Years Ago** at the launch of *The SF Sourcebook* edited by David Wingrove: 'What market do you think this book's aimed at?' someone asked contributor Brian Stableford. 'Remainder,' he said instantly.

# Under Pressure

Paul J. McAuley

**M**aurine F. McHugh's first novel *China Mountain Zhang*, won both the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award and the Lambda Literary Award for its sharp and sensitive portrait of its eponymous gay central character's struggle for self-definition in a world dominated by an authoritarian Chinese culture. Perhaps not since William Gibson's *Neuromancer* was so much attention paid to a first novel (or at least in the U.S. — *China Mountain Zhang* has not been published in Britain). While it did not introduce a new set of tropes on a par with cyberspace, it was remarkable for its clean fusion of mainstream concern with character-driven plot and its portrayal of a detailed, lived-in future society. It was as if a time machine had delivered a samizdat novel from that future to ours.

*Like China Mountain Zhang*, McHugh's second novel, *Half the Day is Night* (Tor, \$21.95), is concerned with the way that the political zeitgeist shapes the way we live. It is set in the undersea nation of Cambe, a third-world pressure-domed environment, roughly equivalent to a fusion of Haiti and Columbia, with offshore banking and camouflaged slums, one half ruled by the army, the other by the Tonton Macoutes. Like that of *China Mountain Zhang*, it is a future which its characters inhabit so thoroughly that its strangeness is burned deep and revealed only obliquely.

French war veteran David Dai finds he has made a mistake in becoming the personal bodyguard of banker Mayla Ling whose old money family lost most of their power when the government was deposed by the army. After Mayla's home is bombed by terrorists, David resigns and loses himself in the anonymity of the slums and brutalizing work in underwater construction — yet he is the only person to whom Mayla can turn after she is double-crossed in a complex and important deal. Like *China Mountain Zhang* both Mayla Ling and David Dai are alienated and isolated, they are under both psychological and physiological pressure. David Dai, who has an unlikely acute sense of empathy for an ex-soldier turned bodyguard (he adopts a kitten and refuses to respond to male competitiveness) can't read the social cues of the underwater city, while Mayla Ling fails to understand him. The novel turns on their mutual comprehension of the currents which they must learn to navigate in order to survive and of each other.

*Half the Day is Night* has the straightforward plot of a political thriller but its bleak irony and the spare particularity of its prose bear comparison (and I do not

evoke the comparison lightly) with the novels of Graham Greene. McHugh's abiding concern is the way in which received notions can control lives unless questioned: as in all the best sf, at its centre is the riddle of what shapes the world. David Dai appears to be the weaker of the two main characters but his strength is that he wants to understand that which makes him weak. It is a lesson in how to see, and the surprisingly clumsy metaphor that alerts us to this in the opening scene is the only



flaw in this assured, chill but ultimately redemptive novel.

Eric Brown's second novel, *Enginemani* (Pan, £4.99) is a romantic throwback in more ways than one. Although it is set in the same nasa-contumua future history as his early short stories, it does not share their headlong nervy rush and the crammed exoticism of their cyberpunkish scenarios. Instead, *Enginemani* is an elegiac work informed by a sense of loss and regret. Enginemani-guided nasa-contumua starships have been superceded by interfaces which warp space so that people can step through them from world to world. Ralph Murren is an ex-Enginemani who is given the chance to help pilot an old-

fashioned and illegal starship to an undiscovered destination. Ella Hunter, an artist who has rebelled against her father's politics, finds herself back on the colony world where she was born, in the middle of a insurrection against the sinister Kelox-Vincoff Organisation which through its ownership of the interfaces, is slowly supplanting the democratic governments of the colony worlds it is supposed to be serving. Mixed into this are Ralph's time-lapsed brother Bobby, who after an accident in the nasa-contumua sees and hears everything with a delay of twenty-four hours, an ancient alien race possessed of knowledge of the secret history of the Universe and a mission to prevent humanity from destroying its own future.

This is retro-sf on a grand scale, with double-dyed villains, thrilling interstellar journeys, hidden alien temples and mystic revelations about the role of intelligence in the evolution of the cosmos. Quite lacking in any of the tropes which inform the corpus of sf in the 90s, *Enginemani* is a loving homage to a lost and more innocent era of sf, rich with echoes of the early fictions of Michael Coney and Bob Shaw — and in particular, the latter's *Palace of Eternity*. Even the characters are gripped by the past — Ralph Murren mourns the lost grandeur of the nasa-contumua starships; Ella Hunter mourns her lost childhood, when she innocently disputed with aliens.

The writing sometimes resorts to cooey melodrama to keep things moving, and the final revelation while grand, is hardly novel — but given Brown's deliberate recherche stance it could hardly be anything else. *Enginemani* is not innovative but that's the point and it is crammed with gorgeous images — Paris overgrown with an alien jungle, a spaceship inside a

Gothic cathedral — that resonate with the thrill of ut-er. If someone tells you that they don't write them like that anymore, make them read this. Eric Brown does.

Kathleen Ann Goonan's *Queen City Jazz* (Tor, \$23.95) is a rich and vigorous, although at times overblown, first novel that deals unflinchingly with the consequences of fully functional nanotechnology. After a utopian period in which cities were enlivened and reshaped by myriads of coordinated microscopic machines, nanotech plagues and information wars have decimated the world's population. In addition, flux from a quasar has ended most broadcast transmissions isolating remaining pockets of civilization. A young woman, Verity, is one of a small

community of Shakers who rigorously avoid and exclude contact with nanotech, but when her friend and her dog are killed she sets off for the Queen City, enlivened Cincinnati where there is the possibility of restoring them to life.

Once she manages to enter the city with the help of a young musician, Verity finds that it is run by a hive mentality composed of giant genetically engineered Bees and Flowers which have trapped the population in endless recursive cycles of historical re-enactment. Verity learns that she is one of a series of clones designed to break this cycle. She is able to enter and alter the city's information network which is mediated through propagation of complex pheromones by the Flowers and Bees, but she is opposed by the city's mad creator, who has hunted down and destroyed previous versions of Verity.

Verity's adventures in enlivened Cincinnati, amongst a population reduced into role-playing writers, artists, jazz musicians and cartoon characters, may be rambling, overlong and unfocused, and the effect of the quasar on radio communications is an unconvincing excuse for the need for pheromone-mediated networks (aside from the handwaving physics, even today most information is cabled and would not be affected). Yet in Queen City Jazz Goonan displays a startlingly original and energetic imagination and refreshes with a dense and rich vision of nanotechnology out of control and a city that has transformed itself into a work of art, the classic plot of a hero discovering her secret identity and affirming it by renewing the world. It is a promising debut.

Gene Wolfe's new tetralogy, *The Book of the Long Sun*, is set on a vast multigeneration starship, the Whorl, whose designers have become Gods in the computer Mainframe, ruling with capricious whim human and robot inhabitants who have forgotten the nature of their world. In only a few days, Silk, an obscure priest blessed (or cursed) with an epiphany from the mysterious Outsider (identified not in the main text but in the index as perhaps – typically, Wolfe's qualification is craftily evasive – being Ah-lah, a forgotten god) has become leader of a popular uprising against the shadowy and despised Ayuntamiento who have ruled the city of Viron.

In the third volume, *Caldé of the Long Sun* (Tor, \$22.95), the uprising breaks out into civil war and the gods of the Mainframe contest to influence its outcome. While Silk tries to resolve the conflicting interests and schemes of gods and political factions, Asuk, a thief who has aided Silk, must find his way back to the city through the underground zones to deliver a message from the goddess who is patron of Viron, and Mayteva Mint, a priestess from Silk's temple becomes General of the insurgents.

This third book is dense with clues and hints pointing towards answers of riddles posed in the earlier volumes. The parentage and fate of Blood, the drug dealer whose purchase of the freehold of Silk's temple

precipitated events, are resolved, and the identity of Silk's own father is now made clear. Much else, especially the destination of the Whorl, remains to be resolved.

Unlike the adventures of Seviran in *The Book of the New Sun*, those of Silk in *The Book of the Long Sun* are more circumscribed. By the third volume, Silk has gained power not over the world but only over a single city – and the world of the Whorl is neither as ancient nor as vast as that of the Urth. And despite all his wounds, Silk is a lesser Fisher King than Seviran, and he is further diminished by becoming only one of several viewpoint characters. Yet Wolfe's masterful sleight-of-hand plotting makes all this matter perhaps less than it should. The revelations he allows us to grasp here are only foreshadowings of the final revelations hinted at in the title of the last book, *Exodus from the Long Sun*. Once that is to hand, perhaps we can begin again to try and understand the nature and meaning of Silk's epiphany.

Also rated

**The Mad Man** (Masquerade Books, \$23.95) Samuel R. Delany asserts in a disclaimer, is most certainly not autobiographical. Yet this novel, aimed at the gay fiction market, contains echoes (perhaps mischievously playful) of Delany's early career as an sf writer in the descriptions of the pulp sf stories of Timothy Hasler, a brilliant philosopher who was murdered in mysterious circumstances. While attempting to unravel Hasler's career John Marr engages in a mix of polymorphously perverse homosexual encounters with mostly homeless men that eventually leads to an understanding, if not an explanation, of Hasler's murder. The sex is graphic and Augean, ending in an orgy that matches anything out of de Sade, and which, pace the famous ruling of Judge John Woolsey overturning the American ban on James Joyce's *Ulysses*, is more erotic than aphrodisiac. It is also one of the fiercest and most fluid of Delany's recent fictions, riding on his compassion and rage at the plight of his fellow gays in this age of AIDS.

**Mars Plus** (Baen Books, \$20) is a collaborative sequel by Frederik Pohl and Thomas T. Thomas to Pohl's Nebula Award winning novel. It is set forty years after Roger Toraway was unwillingly cyborged to enable him to explore Mars without needing external life support systems. But now Toraway's power supply is running out, other cyborgs roam Mars's surface and unmodified human colonists struggle to make ends meet, and the artificial intelligences in Earth's computer network who manipulated the Mars project to ensure their own survival, have their own plans for the future of humanity. The scenario, particularly the economic burden endured by the colonists, is pure Pohl, but Thomas spins it into an adult, fast-paced and complex thriller which tangles and cleverly resolves the fates of both humanity and machine intelligence. As sharecrop collaborations go, this yields more nutrition than most.

Paul McAuley

## Incorporating Magic

### Brian Stableford

Contemporary fantasy is a difficult medium in which to work because the problems involved in placing magical events in a world which is so comprehensively known can become acute. One can, of course, slip into a story-telling mode which is self-consciously artificial, but that strategy risks losing the best advantages of narrative realism which lend a precious sense of urgency and immediacy to the narrative flow. *Rebecca Ore's Slow Funeral* (Tor \$21.95) copes far better than most ingeniously linking its magic to a particular geographical location and rooting it in the unique geology of the region. The power thus made available sustains a community of witches but also lends a measure of opportunity to the fundamentalist Christians who oppose them.

The heroine of the story is a young woman who fled her uncomfortable heritage in adolescence but now must return in order to fulfil an obligation, thus being required to confront and come to terms with the choices which lie before her. Because the world as we know it is only slightly modified in closely-specified terms, the story retains almost all the authority of conventional narrative realism while dealing with intriguingly arcane matters. The novel is both tense and convincing, its one fault – arguably – is that it takes realism one step too far in featuring a central character who does nothing but dither until circumstance finally forces her hand.

*Poppy Z. Brite's Drawing Blood* (Penguin \$3.95) has the advantage of dealing with matters on the very edge of reality where supernatural invasions become so intimately bound up with madness and hallucination that a sceptical reader would be able to contend that nothing authentically fantastic happened at all. Indeed, the supernatural materials here – which include a haunted house and a private dream-universe built out of the products of an artist's imagination – are likely to be so familiar to habitual readers of modern horror fiction that they will jar his or her sensibilities far less than the mundane component of the plot, which describes the evolution of a homosexual love-affair in painstakingly graphic detail. So concerned is Ms Brite to do this job conscientiously in fact, that the part of the story which deals with one partner's homicidal past and still-troubled present is pushed very firmly into the back seat, where it is quite impotent to drive the plot. The result is that the storyline wanders uneasily through a morass of procrastinations and its belated deliverance rings rather false.

As a chronicle of teenage angst, *Drawing Blood* is rather more coherent than its predecessor, *Lost Souls*, but far less compelling, it sacrifices the earlier novel's louche ambiguity without discovering a compensating intensity. It is not clear why

Penguin have elected to package Brite's book as literary fiction rather than genre fiction... but they may be right in assuming that a more appreciative audience for her work will be found among lovers of gay fiction than in the ranks of horror fans.

It is, of course, far easier to fit magic into an imaginary past than an imaginary present, as Gael Baudino does in the series of novels begun with *Strands of Starlight* and continued in *Maze of Moonlight* and *Strand of Shadow* (all Orbit, £4.99).

According to a biographical blurb Ms Baudino has been a 'minster of Diana Who' which places her firmly in the prolific tradition of lifestyle fantasy which takes its inspiration from Margaret Murray's classic scholarly fantasy *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (which claimed – falsely – that the 'witches' persecuted by the Church were practitioners of a clandestine pagan religion). Baudino's fiction deploys Murray's later thesis that European folklore regarding fairies/elves, the Sidhe and so on relates to an actual other race which only recently became extinct: not unnaturally though Baudino substitutes tall and charismatic Tolkienian Elves for the diminutive and rather ignoble characters which figure in the actual folklore.

As with the great majority of evasive literary Satanists, Baudino recruits her villains from the ranks of the aristocracy and

the Church, but she tends to be diplomatic in the latter instance and her revenge fantasies are curiously lacking in any real sense of outrage about the exploits of the Inquisition, except when torture is compounded by rape. The trilogy develops a slightly better sense of time and place as it proceeds but wisely refuses to risk any substantial collision with actual history, although the third volume develops a quasi-Millennarian preoccupation with the notion that the vanishing elves will one day make a big comeback. Those who believe that credibility is the bane and blight of successful fantasy will find little in these books to encourage a change of mind.

It is, of course, even easier to incorporate magic into futuristic scenarios than the pseudo-historical past. All you have to do is assume that there was once a race of elves – sorry, I mean aliens – who mysteriously disappeared but left behind all kinds of wondrous machinery for humans to find in convenient locations like the backyards of wardrobes or, in the case of John E. Stith's *Reunion on Neverend* (Tor, \$21.5), the backside of a display-case in a museum. It is, I suppose, not inappropriate that such randomly-accessible gifts should be made to fall into the hands of complete morons. In this particular display-case the buffoons who find a system of dimensional doorways which render the tedious and expensive business of

space-travel irrelevant naturally decide that the best possible use to which they can put it is to use it to hijack a religious object of purely sentimental value which they think they just might be able to fence to an eccentric double-dealer who will almost certainly try to kill them. Luckily the omnicompetent hero is on hand to bevel them with all manner of petty practical jokes, so that we can chuckle at the farcical manner in which their masterplan goes awry.

According to the blurb, *Reunion on Neverend* is a 'fast-paced hard sf novel' by a man of whom someone writing in SF Chronicle said 'John Stith writes the kind of story that brought me to sf'. In fact, it is a tissue of such patent imbecilities that I cannot imagine how it got into print, and it is the kind of sf which makes it extremely understandable that the vast majority of modern readers find stories about witches, haunted houses and elves infinitely more plausible and far more rewarding. Good fantasy as ingenious self-renewer J. R. R. Tolkien explained in a classic essay, does not insult reason: science fiction ought not to insult reason either and 'hard science fiction' ought by definition to be that science fiction which works very hard to avoid insulting reason. John Stith, alas, doesn't even work as hard in this cause as Gael Baudino, let alone Rebecca Ore.

Brian Stableford

## The Meat of the Story

### Chris Gilmore

Sturgeon's *Revelation* holds that '90 percent of everything is crud.' I rarely dismiss anything as unadulterated crud in print (you should see some of the stuff I don't notice at all [except that you shouldn't – that's why I don't notice it]), but there are times when I wonder if over 90% of the rest isn't thoroughly mediocre, mediocre to quite a high level: granted – but mediocre by design. This is not an original observation and the usual explanation is that, among the ever-diminishing band of large commercial publishers, the marketing men hold the whip hand over the editorial staff. Having noted what sold well last year, they chant 'Give me another one, just like the other one – only stronger!' What they get is last year's flavour with water, but by then they're too drunk to notice.

All too often one must turn for originality to the slipstream: the small presses, the self-publishers and even (God help us!) the vanity presses. I've not enquired where Ossie Allen's *The Dark Tunnel* (Robert Temple, £12.50) fits into this continuum, but it's surely different. For a start it obviously hasn't been edited at all, which is not so bad a thing – editors are like doctors, a weak one is a lot worse than none at all – allowing the author's

more interesting peculiarities to shine forth among the misused capitals and idiosyncratic punctuation.

Allen has invited the reader to share the role of editor with him, an idea which has its roots in the eighteenth century, when Fielding, addressing the reader in *Tom Jones*, coined the immortal phrase 'some little reptile of a critic'. But Allen's approach is new to me: he has an imaginary reader offer occasional **boldface** enigmas as to what is going on, why character A has done B, or how the other thing could have come about, and requests that this or that description be expanded. The answers given are not always satisfactory but the effect is oddly endearing. It's a bit as if one could argue with those adventure-style role-play books from Puffin.

To accommodate this the narrative is written in the historic present and as often happens with experimental writing, it's weak there's a bungled insurrection, some characters get killed, and the story peters out.

*And the rest of the story?*

Well, there's this king of a somewhat dilapidated kingdom. Technology is more than usually haywire – the police carry swords and spears, a girl unzips her skirt – and the politics behind the insurrection are

anyone's guess. The king has three sons and a daughter, of whom the eldest (Julian) wants to kill him to which end he is engaged in a mysterious and sordid intrigue.

The second son, Mark, is an even dodger character, who wishes to kill not only his father but Julian and his younger brother Leo as well. The daughter, Jennifer, is finding her virginity a bit cumbersome, and maybe loses it (or maybe doesn't) to a young man she meets in the park.

The pace is slow, and heavy on descriptive passages, including some strained neologisms ('trigging' for instigating appears early and somewhat later the hornd backformation 'ostent', meaning outward appearance). Leo engages in some jejune philosophizing on the question 'Can morality have a valid foundation in the absence of theism?' (he reaches no conclusion, but flirts with solipsism – if you can't do better than that, Gentle Reader, you're off the course) while Julian lets the question of identity go to his head. Having formed a relationship with a prostitute, he wishes he could be certain she loved him for himself alone, having concluded that (given the history of the relationship) he can never be certain: he has her raped and tortured.

thereby making sure she never will.

Yet I found myself warming to the author. Despite his frequent clumsiness and occasional vulgarity, there's a definite impression of someone who loves the language and is using it as well as he can to make something for which he genuinely cares. He also has a strong visual imagination, which he applies *over and above* to the description of an ingenious automatic self-regulating torture-machine which would do credit to Ian Banks.

This is a distinct oddity, not quite genre and certainly not altogether successful, but it's a first novel, and I hope for more and better from the same source. Now, which of you fat cats is going to take a mild flutter on the softback rights?

It's a paradox of genre writing that a book can be described both as bog-standard and very well done: something which is never true of mainstream or experimental writing. Such was my initial reflection on reading about half of Allan Cole and Chris Bunch's *The Far Kingdoms* (Legend £5.99). It's very much the usual sort of set-up – Onissa, a city-state near the sea, with late medieval technology

and magic that works. There our first-person hero the red-haired hot-blooded Amalico Antero, makes a fool of himself over an expensive and dishonest prostitute and finds that a period of absence would not only be diplomatic but would help to restore himself in his own eyes no less than those of his aged father and good-sort lesbian sister. What better than to (all together now!) Go on a Quest?

For a quest you need a companion or two, and it's Antero's good fortune to fall in with Janos Greycloak, top professional soldier with a long and bloody past; a smattering of illegal magic and a compulsion to go on a quest of his own which might just lie in the same direction – to seek the Far Kingdoms of the title, no less, somewhere to the mysterious east. In between lie hostile primitives, hostile sophistocrats, harsh deserts, wanton women, treacherous allies, inclement weather and all the ingredients of a settling good yarn in the style of Fritz Leiber.

This is all very agreeable, with the usual virtues and vices. The writing is often vivid, the grammar is only occasionally uncertain (whom instead of who, misuse of the conditional), the construction is of necessity episodic with rather a lot of *deus ex machina* in the later development but not dispensed. While the likeable Amalico is the only character of any depth, this is not belittled as a work of deep psychological import, and achieves what at first appear to be very limited ambitions.

But as the book progresses the tone gradually darkens: Janos is a good friend and has saved Antero's life on several occasions but he is a man driven by an obsession which gradually saps his morals and his sanity pan pass. These are hints of this from about mid-way, but they are put on hold while the pair do battle with the corrupt and venal theocracy which rules Onissa (has there ever been a benign theocracy in S&S or anywhere else?) coming to a head when after vast tribulation hair-sbreadth escapes etc they make it to Irayas, capital of the Far Kingdoms. There they find a polity very similar to Ursula Le Guin's *Omelas* and ruled by King Domes, who seems to be auditioning for the part of Old King Cole. All cannot be well in such a place, nor is it, though the grim secret is in no way allegorical.

Having got there, it's necessary to get back again and meet the welcome of the theocrats, but

ancient hereditary enemy, and having taken the last citadel (with great verve and at great cost) are despatched in pursuit of the surviving Archon, a great and evil wizard, who has fled across uncharted seas but may well come back to wreak vengeance if not hammed down and killed.

This is the signal for another long episodic fantasy with plenty of bloodshed, treachery, capture, escape, conjunction, sea-battles and night-time forays against defended positions. It works less well for three reasons:

The first is that Rali, being a woman and therefore only semi-literate (she can read but not write), must impart her story to a sonbe, whom she occasionally teases or berates for no obvious reason, and who possibly in revenge preserves all the contractions of her speech. The narrative therefore bristles with that d\*\*ldom, would've and all the other tedious demotivations that are only acceptable in the direct speech of low characters. I presume the rationale is that the whole book is a serial monologue, but the effect grates on the eye and the ear. Moreover, to achieve contrast the really low characters have to use a dialect consisting mainly of apostrophes, which is more wearing still and makes them harder to take seriously.

The second is Rali's lesbianism. Very few writers can tackle this subject, especially in the first person, without descending into pornography, preciosity or both. For most of the book Cole and Bunch dodge the issue on the reasonable grounds that Rali has quarrelled with her last lover and is too busy fighting to seek another. All right, but to fill the void they insert occasional diatribes against the unfairness of life in Onissa, one of those societies where a woman has to be as good as get half as much recognition. This sort of issue has no relevance in fantasy, since there can be nothing more futile than to rail at the shortcomings of a society which is archaic by definition: overthrow tyrannies, fine, despatch evil magicians, great, but if you want to campaign against stereotyping in education, glass ceilings in industry and lack of creche facilities in the workplace, S&S is not the medium.

Eventually Cole and Bunch realize that this is less than adequate, and try to give the lesbianism some sort of role. One of Rali's lieutenants is visited by an evil dream in which a man with an erect penis appears to her and she (horror of horrors!) is attracted. The poor little lieutenant in an elite fighting force wakes in panic, and is sick. Duhhuh! Cole and Bunch should stick to non-sexual male bonding, which they did effectively in the first book. When Rali meets the beautiful and exotic princess Xia, and it's love at first sight, they try their hands at some sex-writing, but the description of what goes on is repetitive, dreary and could have been plucked whole from the letters column of any top-shelf glossy. Not again! I moaned, as four nipples went hard with desire yet again but



the pair have demons of their own to lay first. It makes for a sombre ending to a tale with more complexity than depth, but the authors keep the themes of friendship, justice and responsibility in focus so that it works well enough for those who like S&S.

Their new book, *The Warrior's Tale* (Legend £15.99 Del Rey, £20) is another first-person story set a few years later. This time the narrator is Rali, Amalico's lesbian sister, by now risen to command of the Maranomian Guard, a female elite corps roughly equivalent to the Sacred Band of Thebes. She and her warriors are at the forefront of a war against Lycanth. Onissa's

there was no mercy.

My third grouch is at a general air of haste in the construction. Near the beginning the Archon invades one of Rali's dreams and wounds her sufficiently to draw blood on her waking body. As sympathetic and contagious magic have a large role I waited for the sequel to this episode but in vain. Everyone including the author seemed to forget about it. In the same spirit, Rali visits two islands called Tristan and Isolde. I searched in vain for any resonance with that classic, heterosexual love story, and had to write the names off as a foolish whim.

As with *The Far Kingdoms* the book ends on a rather downbeat note, and with a strong hint that the Antero family will be back on their travels in due course. I wish them good fortune and a less cluttered tale.

If you want to enter the fantasy market, I'm far from sure that *Simple Prayers* is the best possible title, especially for a first novel. Be that as it may Michael Golding has chosen it for his, from Black Swan at £5.99.

It's one of those semi-serious romps about steamy goings-on among impeccably peasants, awash with superstition and sex that Marcel Aymé did better than anyone. The time is early in the 14th century, the setting Riva di Pignoli, a small island in the lagoon of Venice where inexplicably spring has failed to come. What sacrifices/ ceremonies will the chthonic gods demand of the island's nominally (and in some cases proudly) Catholic inhabitants?

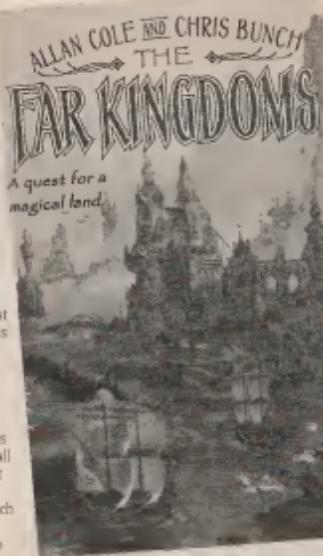
These are without exception physically grotesque, mentally aberrant or both, none less so than the principal viewpoint.

Albertino, who by choice lives alone with his collection of expensive ornamental boxes (all empty) in a roofless ruin on a cemetery islet and is for Ermeneigilda, the evil-tempered overweight youngest daughter of the only rich man on the island, the only possible object of lust. Will their coupling restore fertility to the vegetation? What else may it unleash? What is the significance of the dismembered corpse discovered by Piero the spoiled monk, and hagger-mugger buried by him in a bank of wild thyme?

These questions and many others get answered (more or less) and rather less than monet as the narrative unwinds. It's a strong simple tale of mis-matched loves and ill-omened lusts which should sound a chord in even the chanciest and handsomest reader for all that *Simple Prayers* has all the hallmarks of genre magic realism. Some characters possess interesting occult powers most noticeably Pianna, who can prescribe an infallible herbal remedy for any physical ill and Miriam, who can offer an infallible and practicable Heath-Robinson solution to any engineering problem. These are small enough beat by MR standards (compare especially the sort of capers cut in Ian McDonald's *Delirium Road*), but the authentic disregard for causal relationships and the underlying assumption that emotional states not only define the universe but provide the template wherefrom it perpetually recasts

itself, place it firmly in the tradition.

Nonetheless, this book has far stronger structure than most MR. As the narrative progresses, and plague comes to the island, it resolves itself into an allegory of sacred and profane love, working out their tensions against each other in the presence of mortality in its most conspicuous guise. The earthly lust of Gaius, the local libertine, is spiritualized – perhaps insufficiently – by love for Miriam, while Piero's spiritual longing for her is forced to confront its earthly component. Both love her and seek in their different ways to do her honour, yet Miriam is already pregnant by a third (undisclosed) party Piero.



chooses Miriam and her baby (Nicolò) to model a Madonna & Child, and when the plague strikes, only Piero and Nicolò are spared.

Ahight, it's an unsuitable book. MR is an unsuitable genre. But Golding uses it as I think it's best used: to present the strong stark passions of ignorant people in a world made comprehensible only by faith. The only trouble is, to whom are they being presented? MR is still fairly new and the act of reading it is a statement about the reader – specifically, that he is not a romantic peasant or slum-dweller, buoyed-up by direct illusory experience of the eternal, but a literary geek (or lady). Someday it may become the food of the masses, as Sword-Sorcery has, but not yet, and on the evidence of this book not soon.

Whether it's desirable that MR should become a genre form is one of those deep questions that I don't feel like answering today. It has, and this book proves it. To be frank, I'm more interested in what happens when genres mingle. What price the marriage of MR and SF? Something like *The Warm*

*Carebears* re-written in the style of R. A. Lafferty I imagine – and wouldn't that be a thing!

Such marriages sometimes occur and can even do so retrospectively, as has happened in *The Relic* by Eça de Queiroz, first published in 1887, now brought out by Dedalus in an excellent translation by Margaret Jull Costa at £8.99. In the past I've had occasion to chide Dedalus for offering short weight or inconsistent quality, but this is excellent value for money. The weirdly picaresque story concerns the adventures of Teodonico Raposo, an amoral young man of hedonistic temperament, who finds himself utterly dependent on the bounty of his aunt, an embittered old maid afflicted with religious mania whose principal ambition (it seems to Teodonico) is to convert him into a replica of herself.

He therefore finds himself leading a life of unnatural perversity while conducting an affair with a light woman, as if Cugel the Clever were forced to live the life of Tartuffe. Unsurprisingly his girlfriend drops him for a less encumbered lover, even worse. Teodonico finds the bogus religiosity becoming slightly less bogus by sheer force of repetition – he catches himself actually praying to Our Lady of Grace and Favour, though not for such favours as would appeal to his aunt. Altogether Teodonico is more than willing to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, charged to return with a holy relic which his aunt can devote her declining years to moaning over.

On the way Teodonico conducts the odd amour and gets rocked as namely randy tourists have always been rocked while observing the manifestations of religious bigotry and rapacity in the manner of Mark Twain. All good clean fun, but where was the fantasy? Then with the book nearly half done he and his German travelling companion

Topusius find themselves in the Judea of Tiberius on the day of Jesus's arrest. How? Topusius seems to know, and to have engineered it, but he's too intent on checking the history to enlighten Teodonico who in any case never asks. I sat back for some blasphemous baster, but the mood of the book changed. The description

of the hearing before Pilate is highly coloured, highly atmospheric and smells rather of the lamp (I only spotted one anachronism but suspect as expert would see more) and played dead straight. It's the book's high point, and worth setting beside the equivalent passages from Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*.

Thereafter Teodonico returns with his collection of relics and there's a farcical secondary climax, amusing but heavily telegraphed, followed by an unmystical vision in which he confronts his own nature. This struck me as the most original aspect of the book, which is surely unfair: the same sort of thing has been done better by Jack Vance, but Vance came later. Even so, almost everything is done well, and how often do I write that?

Chris Gilmore

**The Third Alternative** (£2.50 per issue £9.95 for 4 quarterly A5 52pp) and **Zene** (£8.95 per issue £7 for 4 Quarterly A5 36pp) edited by Andy Cox 5 Martins Lane Witcham, Ely, Cambs CB6 2LB

The stories in *The Third Alternative* issue three are vivid, succinct and exciting, surpassing much that has gone before and fulfilling the promise of issue one. *Reading The Vindictive Studio* by Albert Russo is like watching an improbably successful cross between *Death in Venice* and Roger Corman's Poe films. Allen Ashley gleefully rewrites the astronomy books in '7 Rides to Venus' bringing our sister planet more into line with the Roman goddess of love, it's nostalgic, humorous and quite erotic. D F Lewis is at his best in 'The Absence' a subtle, imaginative examination of horror.

Of the remaining half-dozen stories I'd particularly recommend John Gambetti's 'A Room at Mrs Regalemi's', an account of an incident in India which doesn't read like fiction and Roger Stone's elegiac '4 Miles to the Hotel California' which should especially appeal to Eagles fans (although this non-fan didn't feel alienated). It's debatable whether these qualify as sf (or if it even matters), but few sf readers will have problems with these or any of the others in this selection.

I've never been excited by small-press poetry before, but there's always a first time. *Shellfish and Scrabblesides* by Raymond K Avery is so accessible and meaningful that you wonder why readers put up with so much that is neither Gerald England's 'Walking the Wall' reads like the slow ticking of a pendulum clock, and ends with the chilling reminder that 'even together you are alone'. Most powerful of all, perhaps, is Norman Lopez's 'Ultima Tundra', an imagery-laden poem of love and the seasons.

While other small press editors try so hard to be different, Andy Cox is quietly producing the goods. And just to show it's no big deal, he's also editing *Zene*. Subtitled 'the small press guide', it's informative, and as up to date as a quarterly can be. If you're an adventurous reader, it's very useful. If you're an editor or aspiring author, then, if you're taking your task at all seriously, you will already have a copy.

**Black Tears** (£1.75 per issue £6.75 for 4 quarterly A5 68pp) edited by A Bradley, 28 Treaty St, Islington, London, N1 0SY

*Black Tears* issue five is an improvement on the previous one. For a start, it's got a contribution from a Big Name Author in it (Guy N Smith). It's also got two good stories in it – Dominic Dulley's stylish piece about a doppleganger and Paul Penn's 'The Cleanser of the Land'.

Most of the rest of the fiction fits the 'I can't believe I just read that' category. There's something about items of furniture telling each other to shut up, another AIDS-revenge and another – yet another – diner that [yawn] turns out to be serving up butchered women.

There's some pretty good artwork by Dallas Gothic, and most of the non-fiction is not bad. Film reviewer Steve West comes across as a sensible chap, even if he does think ticks

# Small Press Magazines

Paul Beardsley

are insects. The most unusual article in the issue, however, is Melissa Gish's 'Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome'. As you would expect, this is an attempt to analyse one of Mel Gibson's films from the perspective of a proponent of Karl's theories, and as such it's quite amusing. However, I was left with the uncomfortable suspicion that maybe it wasn't meant as sf (or if it even matters), but few sf readers will have problems with this or any of the others in this selection.

**Territories** (Cheques payable to Territories £2 per issue £6 for 3 appearance irregular, A4 32pp) edited by Erich Zann, Gary M Gibson & McNair, 65 Niddrie Road (02) Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland G42 8PT

*Territories* issue four is subtitled 'sf and slipstream journal'. In context, the meaning of 'slipstream' is refreshingly unpretentious, something along the lines of 'non-SF things that are likely to interest SF readers'.

Paul McAlley is interviewed by Gary M Gibson. Dave Hyde reviews a considerable amount of biographical material about Philip K Dick. Fergus Bannon attempts to revive interest in an otherwise destined-for-obscenity film *Koyaanisqatsi* – and judging by his description it's well worth checking out. Jim Steel stretches the already broad local definition of slipstream by charting the career of sixties rock whacko Roky Erickson – presumably there are sf readers out there who are still impressed by subtle references to drugs concealed in ostensibly innocent lyrics. Ian McDonald uses a lot of words to make some pleasure but obvious observations about Remux culture. Ten books are reviewed. Mike Cobley in his regular slot, attacks the novelization/scripoff anomalies and the insidious (and quite real) damage they are doing to the genre.

And, looking a little out of place, is a longish piece of fiction, 'The Sight of God' by Phil Raines & Harvey Welles. I can only describe it as unexciting.

As regards style, the contributors come across as trying a little too hard to be dangerous. For instance, Cobley's slot is called 'Shark Tactics' which on this occasion is laughable, considering the target of his tirade. Elsewhere, in the speed advert 'VR Boy' Caspar Williams launches a satirical attack on targets that just aren't worth satirising. The presentation leaves a bit to be desired, too, but these are largely cosmetic

points, and do not detract from the magazine's content, which is considerable and varied.

**Scheherazade** (£1.99 per issue, £7.50 for 4 quarterly A5 34pp) edited by Elizabeth Cowan, St Ives, Maypole Road, East Ginneston, West Sussex RH19 1HL

A young woman, unaware that she has earned three wishes from a witch, wishes that something exciting would happen. With hilarious consequences. At least the author (Dendre Cowan, who happens to be the editor's sister) appears to think so. Frankly, I thought the young woman should have demanded a refund.

*Scheherazade: The Magazine of Fantasy, Science Fiction & Gothic Romance* is now 10 issues old, and my opening remarks aside, it's going strong. It's still got that Arabian Nights feel with a feminine slant that in no way excludes male readers (or writers, for that matter). Tim Connon interviews Geoff Ryman, who makes some thoughtful comments about writing sf and how seriously you should take it. Jane Gaskell's graphic novel 'King's Daughter' is serialized in the comic pages, though I defy anyone to pick up the story at this late stage.

Of the six stories, five are good uns, although I suspect I am in the minority in that I was amused by David Redd's 'A Journey Along the Sprout Vector' ('Hoodie's Wood' by Sue Thomasos should appear to Holdstock fans, and Chris Paul, drawing on his location in the Gambia, provides the memorable 'Ghost of the Mind'). Authors Marise Morland and Sandra Newman also deserve a mention.

My main criticism of *Scheherazade* is its thinness, still. But what the heck, it's full of good stories imbued with a touch of the fantastic, the romantic and the exotic. Like *Albedo One* and *The Third Alternative*, it's very much a reader's magazine (as opposed to a repository for the outpourings of never-to-be-read would-be authors). Recommended for fireside reading, especially when it's raining outside.

By the time you read this, The 20th issue of *Alternatives* will have appeared. Despite a recent price rise, it's still very inexpensive at £1.50 for 60pp, or £8 for 4 issues. Issue 20 features fiction by Rhys H. Hughes, Conrad Williams and others, an interview with Gisela Naylor (the *Red Dwarf* creators), stuff about the *Akens* series of films, and loads more. If you're a PC owner (286, VGA, DOS 3.3 minimum requirements), you may be interested in getting the electronic version which is longer, and has even more stuff about *Akens*. It's probably a first, and at only £1.99 (inc P&P) it's certainly worth a look. Cheques payable to Mark Rose, 39 Balfour Court, Station Road, Harpenden, Herts AL5 4XT.

Meanwhile I'll be putting together the second issue of *Substance*, the first having appeared in November. That's available for £2.50 per issue, £9 for 4 from Neville Barnes, 65 Conifer Avenue, Rustington, West Sussex BN16 3LZ. It's a shame I can't review it.

Paul Beardsley

# The Hubbard Bible

Mike Ashley

Now that L. Ron Hubbard has become a cult figure and his work has taken on almost mythical proportions (with some), it was inevitable that a full bibliography would appear. Initially, I approached **The Fiction of L. Ron Hubbard** by William J. Widder, MA (Bridge Publications, \$59) with some caution. Hubbard had long maintained that during the 1930s he had sustained a prolific output of a million words or more a year, yet in my own research I had never obtained evidence for this. I wondered whether this bibliography would prove that claim true or whether in order to further embroider the Hubbard myth, it would create a body of work that might prove suspect. I was delighted to discover that it did neither. This book, so far as I can check, is a thorough work of scholarship and establishes an output by Hubbard that is both believable and informative. At last there is a firm basis for the evaluation of Hubbard's fiction.

In fact the bibliography is fascinating just to emphasize the point: it does only cover Hubbard's fiction, and not the enormity of his non-fiction (apart from some non-Dianetic magazine items), but that is probably all to the good as it focuses the mind on the significance of Hubbard's pulp career and of his contribution to science fiction and fantasy. In the 1940s Hubbard's work was held in high regard, especially his contributions to *Unknown* and *Assassins* and it only fell into disrepute in the 50s and 60s with the increasing opposition to Scientology. The problem with this was that Hubbard was being ostracized and his fiction ignored. Hence when Jack Adrian assembled a volume of Hubbard's previously unprinted stories in the 1970s no publisher would go near it.

After an interesting but all too brief preface which scarcely touches Hubbard's life the volume runs into a series of chronologies listing the key dates in Hubbard's life, and the publication sequence of his fiction in genre order before moving into the main bibliographies. These follow the accepted practice of listing books and magazine stories in chronological order, citing all appearances (including future proposals) and providing a brief plot outline. We thus discover that Hubbard's first published stories were in *The University*

*Halcyon Monthly Literary Review* starting with "Tah" in 1932 and that his first professional appearance was with *The Green God in Timling Adventures* in February 1934. This was a non-fantasy but was typical of much commercial adventure fiction of its day about a naval intelligence officer searching for a lost Chinese idol.

Once Hubbard began writing professionally there is no doubt that his output became impressive for a period but no more impressive than the real wordsmiths of the day such as Frederick Faust, Lester Dent, Arthur J. Burks, H. Bedford-Jones and Norwell Page. Hubbard's output seems to have averaged three or four stories a month during 1934 to 1937 though this amounted to over a hundred before *The Dangerous Dimension* introduced him to science-fiction readers in *Astounding's* July 1938 issue. Hubbard's work covered all genres though mostly adventure and western, but we can now identify at least one earlier fantasy, *The Death Flyer* in *Mystery Novel Magazine* for April 1936 where a man boards a ghost train and seeks to save the life of a girl who died in its wreckage ten years earlier.

The bibliography also allows us to see Hubbard's sf and fantasy in the context of his other contemporary work. Although publication order does not always follow the sequence of composition, it is interesting to see the extent to which fantasy began to dominate Hubbard's writing in the 40s, not just for *Astounding* and *Unknown* but in other pulps. For *Five Novels Monthly* for instance he wrote "If I Were You," about a circus midget who switches bodies with a lion tamer, while for *Wild West Weekly* he produced "Shadows from Boothill" about a hired gunman who suddenly acquires two sinister shadows. Both of these just predate what I consider as Hubbard's masterpiece, *Fair*, and seem to suggest a conscious change in Hubbard's writing from no-holds-barred adventure to a more thoughtful and increasingly sinister form of fantasy. Particularly interesting, in light of the soon-to-appear science of Dianetics, is a presumably humorous story "The Magic Cook" in, of all places, *The Rio Kali Western Magazine* for June 1948. Here a cook is given a token which he believes has magical properties, but it is only after he has performed several heroic deeds that he

discovers it is nothing but a cheap trinket. This demonstrates in simple form Hubbard's credo that we are all capable of bettering ourselves if we can master our own inhibitions.

In addition to Hubbard's published magazine fiction, which runs to 223 titles, Widder identifies Hubbard's unpublished works. This includes ten listed as sf or fantasy though there are a few other fantasies dotted around under other genres. In total there are 98 unpublished but complete stories listed, plus another 71 fragments. Few of these are dated so it is impossible to know how many of them are from the 30s or 40s, but they begin to give some credence (though not enough) to Hubbard's claim as a prolific wordsmith since most of these near-400 items would have been produced between 1934 and 1949 (less three war years) before Hubbard turned to Dianetics.

There is also a listing of Hubbard's verse. I found this surprising as I had not mentally registered the extent of Hubbard's verse in his *Mission Earth* sequence, but here it is all identified. There appears to be only one separately published piece of Hubbard verse from 1946 though there's a further cache of unpublished stuff. In addition to the listing of Hubbard's books and magazine fiction, which is clearly the core of the bibliography, there are details of audio tapes and recordings, music albums, plays and screenplays, and the inevitable back-patting of honours awards and critical appreciation. This last includes some fascinating reproductions of columns and features from the pulps.

The book is rounded out by a confirmation of Hubbard's pen names and other miscellaneous pieces including an attractive colour photograph portfolio of Hubbard's life and works.

Only the format in which this book is published (big and bold) betrays any bias toward Hubbard. The rest is a matter-of-fact, scholarly and highly readable presentation of Hubbard's works and will, I have no doubt, rapidly form the basis for the next chapter in the rediscovery and reappraisal of Hubbard the writer.

Mike Ashley

# Books Received

October 1994

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

**Anthony Piers** *Gems of the Gargoyle*. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85391-2, 320pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition, proof copy received; the latest in the Xanth series) February 1995

**Anthony Piers** *Harpy Thyme*. New English Library, ISBN 0-150-60438-1, 343pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; a 'Xanth' novel) 6th October 1994

**Barbier, Suzanne I.** *Clive Barker: Mythmaker for the Millennium*. Foreword by Peter Atkins. Illustrated by Pete Quesley. British Fantasy Society (2 Harwood St., Stockport SK4 3JU) ISBN 0-952-4153-0-5, 62pp, small-press paperback, cover by Les Edwards £4.99. (Critical study of the well-known horror novelist, first edition, a nicely produced booklet, but the text is all too brief) No date shown, received in October 1994

**Bear Greg** *Songs of Earth and Power*. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85669-5, 558pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy omnibus, first published in the UK, 1992, proof copy received; it contains revised versions of Bear's two full-length ventures into the fantasy mode, *The Infinity Concerto* [1984] and *The Serpent Mage* [1986], plus an afterword by the author; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 70 [January 1995]

**Bell Julie** *The Julie Bell Portfolio*. Introduction by Boris Vallejo. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger ISBN 1-45028-345-1, 64pp, very large-format paperback, £12.95. (Fantasy art portfolio, first edition, 28 colour plates, beautifully produced, in commenting on the same publisher's *The Boris Vallejo Portfolio* [March 1994] we said 'with its emphasis on heavily sculptured near-naked bodies, Vallejo's art verges on the pornographic but is undeniably well done of its sort'; exactly the same applies here; Julie Bell is Vallejo's wife, a former bodybuilder and model) 10th November 1994

the Finest' and 'Dream of the Wolf, first appeared right here in *Interzone*) 20th October 1994

**Cedogian, Mary** *And Then Their Hearts Stood Still: An Exuberant Look at Romantic Fiction Past and Present*. Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-56486-3, 322pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Critical study of romantic novels, first edition; this appealing lightly-written critique is devoted to a genre which is outside *Interzone*'s normal sphere of interest but it's surprising how much borderline fantasy/romance material creeps in; there are mentions of the 18th-century Gothic novelists Marie Corelli's religious fantasies [James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*, Mary Stewart's 'Merlin' books, Virginia Andrews's dark fairy tales and so on and on -- an object lesson in

Boris Vallejo is one of the world's top fantasy artists. He has always been interested in body building, and is often asked if there really are people like the people he paints. His wife, Julie Bell (pictured below), is a body-builder and has modelled for many of his paintings. She features in a collection of Vallejo's photographs, *Bodies Fortissimo*, from Dragon's World/Paper Tiger. She is also an artist in her own right, and *The Julie Bell Portfolio*, a collection of her paintings, is listed on this page.



how popular genres interpenetrate. Mary Cadogan was a regular contributor to the late *Mithrax* magazine, and her range of interest is very wide. Recommended | 21st October 1994

Chadburn, Mark. **Nocturne**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05793-9, 398pp, A-format paperback cover by Max Schindler £5.99 (Horror novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; a second novel by this one-time Anti Nazi League campaigner and union activist) | 17th November 1994

Cole Allan and Chris Bunch. **The Warrior's Tale**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38733-3, 439pp, hardcover, cover by Keith Parkinson, \$21 (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1994, sequel to *The Fair Kingdoms*; although the authors are American, it seems the UK Legend edition, listed here some time ago precedes this US edition by a month) | 30th November 1994

Conner Mike. **Archangel**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85743-8, 350pp, hardcover, \$21.95 (Alternative-world sf novel, first edition, proof copy received; here we go again with the clashing titles in Britain: Gary Kilworth has just published a novel called *Archangel*) | February 1995

Coppel Alfred. **Glory's War: Book Two of the Goldenwing Cycle**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85471-4, 288pp, hardcover \$21 (SF novel, first edition, proof copy received) | April 1995

Daniels, Les. **The Don Sebastian Vampire Chronicles**. Raven, ISBN 1-85487-343-1, 232+222+199pp, A-format paperback, cover by Les Edwards, £5.99 (Horror omnibus, first edition; the three constituent novels, *The Black Castle*, *The Silver Skew* and *Clinten Vampire* were first published in the USA in 1978, 1979 and 1981) | 10th October 1994

Delany, Samuel R. **They Fly at Ciron**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85775-6, 222pp, hardcover, \$19.95 (Fantasy novel, first published in 1993, proof copy received; it was previously issued by a small press, and is based on material which appeared in various magazines in the 1960s and 70s) | February 1995

Fest, Raymond E. **Shadow of a Dark Queen**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224612-0, 382pp, C-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor £8.99 (Fantasy novel, first published in 1994, first in the 'Serpentwar Saga' sub-series of 'Riftwar' novels) | 26th November 1994

Ferret, Tim. **We Murder**. Illustrated by the author. Morgan/ The Dog Factory [84 Ivy Ave, Southdown, Bath BA2 1AN], ISBN 1-870338-06-5, 48pp, small-paperback no price shown (Horror [?]) novella, first edition, limited to 200 numbered copies signed by the author/artist | No date shown

reviewed in October 1994

Furey Maggie. **Harp of Winds**. Book Two of the Artefacts of Power: Legend, ISBN 0-909-92710-1-X, 405pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Van Houten £5.99 (Fantasy novel, first edition) | 3rd November 1994

Furey, Maggie. **Harp of Winds**. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-36526-5, £8.99/£4.99, A-format paperback, \$6.99 (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1994, proof copy received; this one contains a lengthy summary of the first volume, *Aurora* and an Index of Characters, which aren't in the British edition) | February 1995

Garnett, David, ed. **New Worlds 4**. Gollancz/VGSC, ISBN 0-575-05147-7, 224pp, B-format paperback, £6.99 (SF anthology, first edition; all-new stories by Bram Stoker, Bayley, Matthew Dicksons, Peter F. Hamilton, Robert Holdstock, Ian McDonald, Michael Moorcock, Lisa Tuttle and others, plus a brilliant article by David Langford, alias, Garnett announces that this will be the last of the series from the present publisher) | 17th November 1994

Garnett, David. **Stargonauts**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-186-4, 314pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mike Posen £4.99 (Humorous sf novel, first edition, Garnett's return to sf novel-writing after more than 20 years away) | 3rd November 1994

Grant, Charles. **Jackals**. TopForge, ISBN 0-312-85565-6, 255pp, hardcover, cover by Joe Curcio, \$20.95 (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; after many years of authorship it seems Mr Grant has dropped the 'U' from his name — a bit like Dean Koontz dropping his 'R' — middle initials must be cool) | October 1994

Halifax, Lord, ed. | **The Ghost Book of Charles Lindley, Viscount Halifax**. Foreword by Simon Marsden, Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0151-X, xii+244+171pp, B-format paperback, cover by Marsden, \$10.95 (Horror anthology, originally published as two volumes, *Lord Halifax's Ghost Book* 1936 and *Further Stories from Lord Halifax's Ghost Book* 1937; this edition first published in the UK by Robinson, 1994) | November 1994

Hartwell, David G., and Kathryn Cramer, eds. **The Ascent of Wonder: The Evolution of Hard SF**. Introduction by Gregory Benford. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-271-2, 990pp, hardcover, cover by John Berkley £25 (SF anthology, first published in the USA, 1994, a massive volume of 66 stories, tending towards the avowedly science-based kind of sf, with reprinted work by Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, J. G. Ballard, David Brin, Arthur C. Clarke, Hal Clement, Pifford K. Dick, Robert L. Forward, William Gibson, Robert A. Heinlein, Ursula Le Guin, Larry Niven, Frederik Pohl, Bob Shaw, Clifford D. Simak, Theodore

Sturgeon, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, Gene Wolfe and many others — not all of them writers one would have thought representative of 'hard sf', reviewed by Brian Stableford in *Interzone* 88 | 20th October 1994

Holt, Tom. **Odins and Gods**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-266-6, 382pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Lee, £14.99 (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition, proof copy received) | 19th January 1994

Jones, Phil. **Fission Impossible: Round Two of the Galaxy Game**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-1446-84, 270pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Posen £4.99 (Humorous sf novel, first published in 1993, reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 84) | 10th November 1994

Jones Stephen, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Frankenstein**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-330-X, xiv+577pp, B-format paperback, cover by Luis Rey, £5.99 (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains the complete text of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* plus new and reprint stories by Robert Bloch, John Brunner, Ramsey Campbell, David Cage, Dennis Etchison, Paul J. McAuley, Graham Masterton, Kim Newman, David J. Schow, Guy N. Smith, Michael Marshall Smith, Karl Edward Wagner and others) | 10th October 1994

King, Stephen. **Nightmares and Dreamscapes**. New English Library ISBN 0-450-61009-8, 836pp, A-format paperback £5.99 (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1993, reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 82) | 6th October 1994

Lawhead Stephen. **The Endless Knot: Song of Alibion, Book Three**. Lion, ISBN 0-7439-2783-1, 422pp, paperback, £4.99 (Fantasy novel, first published in 1993, reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 68) | 28th October 1994

Leech, Ben. **The Bidden**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-33540-5, 314pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino £4.99 (Horror novel, first edition, Ben Leech is a pseudonym of Stephen Bowkett, previously best known for his juvenile thrillers) | 11th November 1994

McCallum, Anne. **The Chronicles of Pern: First Fall**. Bantam, ISBN 0-552-13913-0, 284pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Weston, £4.99 (SI collection, first published in 1993) | 8th December 1994

McHugh Maureen F. **China Mountain Zhang**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-270-4, 312pp, B-format paperback, £5.99 (SI novel, first published in the USA, 1992, the publishers have sent us a copy of the American paperback edition with a UK cover proof, James Tiptree Award winner reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 64, at last the much-praised McHugh makes it to Britain, and about time too) | 26th January 1995

Matheson Richard **Now You See It...** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85113-6 220pp, hardcover \$19.95 (Horror novel, first edition, proof copy received) February 1995

Modestov, L. E. **In The Order War.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85769-9, 479pp, hardcover \$23.95 (Fantasy novel, first edition, proof copy received) the fourth book in the *Recluse* series | January 1995

Nicolazzini Piergiorgio ed **I Mondi del Possibile.** Editrice Nord (Milan, Italy) ISBN 88-429-0740-5 xvi+595pp, hardcover, cover by Michael Whelan, price not shown (Alternative world of anthology, first edition, a bumper collection of well-known English-language utopian/stories translated into Italian, contributors include Greg Bear, David Brin, L. Sprague de Camp, Karen Joy Fowler, Nancy Kress, James Morrow, Kim Stanley Robinson, Harry Turtledove and Howard Waldrop, among others. Brian Stableford and Kim Newman are acknowledged for their editorial advice, there is what looks to be a learned introduction by the editor and a good secondary bibliography of the subject.) Late entry, 1993 publication received in October 1994

Noon, Jeff **Vurt.** Pan ISBN 0-330-33881-1 345pp A-format paperback, cover by Stuart Hunter £4.99 (50/fantasy novel, first published in 1993, winner of the 1994 Arthur C. Clarke Award: what's happened to Ringpuff, the new publishing house which did this book with such fanfare last year? aren't they supposed to have published other sci titles by now, including a sequel to this book by Jeff Noon? if they have released anything more they've neglected to send it to us for review) 21st October 1994

Norman Michael, and Beth Scott **Haunted America.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-84751-9, 411pp hardcover \$23.95 (Ghost-story collection, first edition, it consists of 'true' or at any rate legendary material retold, a big book with a remarkably full bibliography, it should be of interest to lovers of supernatural Americana) October 1994

Pike Christopher **The Listeners.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-62571-6, 328pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Daniels £4.99 (Horror novel, first published in the USA 1994. Christopher Pike is a pseudonym for an American author who keeps his real name well hidden, this is his second adult novel, though his many juveniles have been worldwide bestsellers) 20th October 1994

Sawyer Robert | **End of an Era.** New English Library ISBN 0-450-61749-1 247pp, A-format paperback, \$4.99 (SF novel, first published in the USA 1994. Sawyer is a Canadian author born 1960, and this is his fifth novel although probably his first to be published in Britain) 6th October 1994

[Shelley Mary] **The Essential Frankenstein.** Edited by Leonard Wolf. Illustrated by Christopher Bing. Plume, ISBN 0-452-26968-7, 337pp, C-format paperback, £8.99 (Annotated edition of the classic horror novel, first published in the USA 1993 the scholarship may be worthy but this is a rather half presentation: the author's name does not appear on the spine, and she's barely acknowledged on the title page — Wintress and Edited by Leonard Wolf, it says, 'including the complete novel by Mary Shelley' the illustrations are mediocre. Plume is an imprint of Penguin USA, but this is 'A Byron Press Visual Publications Inc Book' (it's the second American printing with a British price added) 27th October 1994

Slung Michele, ed **I Shudder at You: Touch: 22 Tales of Sex and Horror.** Roc, ISBN 0-14-015967-3 xvi+379pp, A-format paperback, cover by Graham Potts £4.99 (Horror anthology, first published in the USA 1991, third Penguin printing, it contains mainly reprint stories by Robert Aickman, Clive Barker, Michael Blumlein, Jonathan Carroll, Angela Carter, Thomas M. Disch, Stephen R. Donaldson, Christopher Fowler, Stephen King, Patrick McGrath, Ruth Rendell and others, a classic anthology of its type recommended) 27th October 1994

Slung, Michele, ed **Shudder Again: 22 Tales of Sex and Horror.** Roc, ISBN 0-14-023443-8, 357pp, A-format paperback, £4.99 (Horror anthology, first published in the USA 1993, this follow-up contains mainly reprint stories by J. G. Ballard, Ray Bradbury, Ramsey Campbell, Nancy A. Collins, A. E. Coggan, Conan Doyle, Harlan Ellison, Elizabeth Jane Howard, Arthur Machen, Mervyn Peake, Lisa Tuttle, T. H. White and others, despite stiff competition from the excellent Ellen Datlow [see her *Little Deaths: 24 Tales of Sex and Horror*, listed here two months ago]. Michele Slung is really very good at this sort of thing, her preface and story-notes are first-class, her choice of stories impeccable) 27th October 1994

Stableford Brian **The Werewolves of London.** Carroll & Graf ISBN 0-7867-0180-3 467pp, A-format paperback, \$4.95 (Fantasy/horror/metaphysical SF novel, first published in the UK, 1990, reviewed by John Clark in *Intervue* 43) November 1994

Stashoff, Christopher **A Wizard in Mind: The First Chronicle of the Rogue Wizard.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85695-4, 222pp, hardcover \$19.95 (Fantasy novel, first edition, proof copy received: the first in a new sub-series of Warlock books) March 1995

Sutton David ed **Voices From Shadow.** Introduction by Stephen Jones, illustrated by Jim Pitts, Alan Hunter and others. Shadow Publishing | 194 Station Rd, Kings Heath

Birmingham B14 1TE] no ISBN, small-press paperback, £3.99 (\$4.25 or US\$11 postage inclusive, payable to David Sutton) (Collection of critical essays about horror/fantasy fiction, first edition, contributors include Mike Ashley, Eddy C. Berlin, Ramsey Campbell and others, authors covered include Aickman, Lovecraft, C. L. Moore and William Morris, the pieces are reprinted with revisions from the *Shadow* small-press magazine, 1988-98) Late entry, 30th September publication received in October 1994

Swanson Michael **The Iron Dragon's Daughter.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-146-4, 376pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £4.99 (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA 1993, reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Intervue* 43) 10th November 1994

Trevor, Elleston **Flycatcher.** Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-312-85647-4, 286pp, hardcover \$21.95 (Horror/suspense novel, first edition, Elleston Trevor really is a phenomenon: he's been writing prolifically for more than 50 years, mainly thrillers [including the *Adam Hall* (Oxford books), and yet he still looks so young in his publicity photos!) October 1994

Ugolini Jenny ed **The Chatto Book of Ghosts.** Chatto & Windus, ISBN 0-7011-6147-7, xvi+479pp, hardcover, cover by Julian Abel-Hyder, £16.99 (Ghost-story anthology, first edition, yet another commonplace book [see D. J. Enright's *Oxford Book of the Supernatural*, listed here last month] with extracts from numerous works rather than complete stories, authors include the inevitable Homer and Shakespeare, Dickens and Henry James, Kipling and Angela Carter, but some of the choices are quite surprising, there's a bit from William Gibson's of novel *Neuromancer* in here, and quotes from fiction by Orson Scott Card, Terry Pratchett and Anne Rice) 31st October 1994

Vonarburg, Elisabeth **Reluctant Voyagers.** Translated by Jane Birney. Bantam/Spectra ISBN 0-553-56242-8, 469pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99 (SF novel, first published in Canada as *Les voyageurs malgré eux*, 1994, proof copy received) March 1995

Warrington Freda **Sorrow's Light.** Pan ISBN 0-330-33348-8, 257pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Bensen, £4.99 (Fantasy novel, first published in 1993) 11th November 1994

Weis, Margaret and Tracy Hickman **Into the Labyrinth: A Death Gate Novel.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40378-8, 451pp, A-format paperback, cover by Stephen Youll, £4.99 (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993, sixth in the series) October 1994

# SPINOFFERY

This is a list of all books received which fall into these sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed 'spinoffs', 'recusive fiction', 'spinoffs' sequels by other hands, 'shared worlds' and 'sharecrops' (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term 'Spinoffery' has been coined as a heading for the sake of brevity.

Anderson, Kevin J. **Champions of the Force: The Jedi Academy Trilogy, Volume 3, "Star Wars"**. Bantam. ISBN 0-533-40810-0. 324pp. A-format paperback, cover by John Alvin, £3.99 (SF movie spinoff novel first published in the USA, 1994) 10th November 1994

Anonymous, ed. **The Art of Star Wars: Episode VI, Return of the Jedi**. Del Rey. ISBN 0-345-39204-3. 153pp. very large-format paperback, cover by Ralph McQuarrie, \$18 (SI art book including colour matte paintings, roughs, storyboard extracts, posters, etc. and the complete script by Lawrence Kasdan and George Lucas of the film *Return of the Jedi* originally published in the USA as *The Art of Return of the Jedi*) 13th October 1994

Ashley, Mike, ed. **The Camelot Chronicles: Heroic Adventures From the Time of King Arthur**. Carroll & Graf. ISBN 0 7867 0085 8 xii+418pp. trade paperback, cover by C. Luis Rey \$12.95 (Fantasy anthology first published in the UK, 1992 a 'shared-world' anthology of sorts, and a follow-up to the same editor's *The Pendragon Chronicles* (1990), it contains a mix of new and reprinted works by Lillian Belloc, Vera Chapman, Keith Taylor, Peter Tremayne, P. G. Wodehouse, Jane Yolen and many others, presumably it was published in Britain by Robinson, but we didn't receive a review copy at the time) October 1994

Buxton, Piers. **2001: Filming the Future**. Foreword by Arthur C. Clarke. Annum Press. ISBN 1-85419-365-2. 167pp. very large-format paperback, £14.95 (Behind-the-scenes account of the making of the classic Stanley Kubrick's movie, first edition illustrated throughout in colour with photographs, film stills, production artwork, etc.) 20th October 1994

Call, Deborah, ed. **The Art of Star Wars: Episode V, The Empire Strikes Back**. Text by Vic Bulluck and Valene Hoffman. Del Rey. ISBN 0-345-39203-5. 176pp. very large-format paperback, cover by Ralph McQuarrie, \$18 (SI art book including colour matte paintings, roughs, storyboard extracts, etc., originally published in the USA as *The Art of The Empire Strikes Back* 1980) 13th October 1994

Clarke, Arthur C. and Gentry Lee. **Rama Revealed**. The magnificent conclusion to the story of 'Rama'. Orbit. ISBN 1-85723-248-4. 477pp. C-format paperback, £9.99 (SF novel first published in 1993, third of a sharecropped trilogy (mainly by Gentry Lee) based on Clarke's original novel *Rendezvous with Rama*) 7th November 1994

Daley, Brian. **Star Wars: The National Public Radio Dramatization**. Del Rey. ISBN 0-345-39109-8. 346pp. B-format paperback, \$11 (SF movie spinoff radio script, based on characters and situations created by George Lucas, first edition) 10th October 1994

Gross, Edward and Mark A. Altman, eds. **Great Birds of the Galaxy: Gene Roddenberry & the Creators of Star Trek**. Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0968-X. 143pp. very large-format paperback, £9.99 (Interview collection featuring various makers of the SF television series first published in the USA 1994, among those interviewed in addition to the late Roddenberry, are Nicholas Meyer, Leonard Nimoy and William Shatner) 27th October 1994

Hinton, Craig. **The Crystal Bacephalus**. Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures. Virgin/Doctor Who. ISBN 0-426-20429-8, 296pp. A-format paperback, £4.99 (SF television-series spinoff novel, first edition, presumably a debut novel by a British writer) October 1994

Kalogridis, Jeanne. **Covenant With the Vampire**. The Diaries of the Family Dracula. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1244-9. 244pp. hardcover, cover by Keith Sculley, £16.99 (Horror novel, first published in the USA 1994, it's the first of a trilogy which prequelizes [great word eh?] Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the publishers are keeping the author's previous career a secret, but apparently Jeanne Kalogridis is the real name of someone who is much better known under a pseudonym) 6th October 1994

Leonard, Paul. **Venusan Lullaby**. Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures. Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20424-7. 321pp. A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson £4.99 (SF television-series spinoff novel, first edition, 'Paul Leonard' is a pseudonym for P. J. L. Hinder small press writer and *litterateur* subscriber and this is presumably his debut novel, the Doctor Who series is turning out to be a useful proving ground for new British sf writers) October 1994

Milan, Victor. **Close Quarters**. Battletech Books, ISBN 0-451-45736-6. 390pp. A-format paperback, cover by Boris Vallejo, £5.99 (Shared-world sf novel based on a role-playing game, first published in the USA 1994, it's copyright FASA Corporation, this

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Watson, Ian. **Harlequin**. Warhammer 40,000. Boxtree. ISBN 0-7522-0965-5, vi+246pp. hardcover, cover by Dave Gallagher, £13.99 (Shared-universe role-playing-game-inspired sf novel, first edition, sequel to the same author's *Impulsor*, this is the first Games Workshop-tied hardcover novel, as opposed to A- or B-format paperback originals) 27th October 1994

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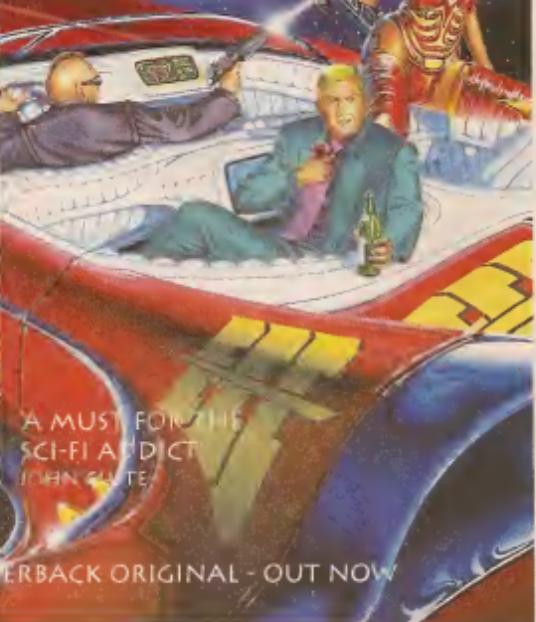
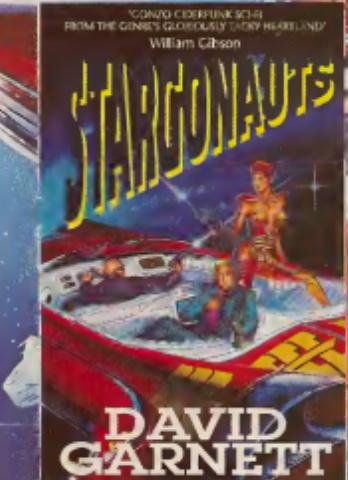
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